

## **PROVISION GIVEN**

Exodus 16:11-19, 17:1-6

Did you ever consider that every situation we encounter in life is both a learning opportunity and is also a test to see how we will respond to various circumstances? If we respond correctly, then we will be able to move to a new level of growth. If we respond incorrectly, then we will likely keep having the opportunity to take the same test, time after time (perhaps in different situations), until we finally learn the lesson and make the right response. There is a certain element of truth in this perspective in that we do grow a little at a time and it seems that, as in the case of building a brick wall, you cannot leave out a row of bricks and have a sound wall. What we learned yesterday is what we build on today.

In the “wilderness” experience of the Children of Israel, God was preparing them to form a new nation that would be an important element in their being stewards of His plan of salvation. Additionally, they would be a group from whom the Messiah would come. The Israelites encountered many tests along the way that would show the progress they were making toward becoming the people God would use. They needed to grow in their loyalty to God, their confidence in Him and in their testimony of Him.

Sometimes our questions about the future have their origins in unbelief or doubt resulting from a poor memory or ignorance. After about one month of traveling in the wilderness their “adventure” had ceased to be fun and conflicts arose. It is thought that when they left Egypt, they carried enough food with them to last about a month. For a brief period of time they camped at Elim which was an area that had twelve springs and 70 palm trees. Apparently, things were tolerable while they were there since they had food and water. However, with the passing of a month, the problem of a lack of food came up and that was then followed by a lack of water when they left Elim.

When life is going along and things are OK or average, then it is almost impossible to determine the character of a person by observing their behavior. On the other hand, when things are really great or really terrible, then we see beneath all the layers of social niceties that we use to cover up the real person. For example, a person who wins the lottery (which is a good thing) might go off the “deep end” in reckless living and end up in a lot of trouble. The other side of this would be a person who wins the lottery and uses the money to help his family and others in need. An opposite situation might be a person who loses everything and then becomes bitter and even turns to stealing or shady business practices during the time of stress. Some, who have lost everything, come to their senses, get their life together and become successful. These examples show us that character counts.

The Israelites had already been tested when they were trapped between the Egyptian army and the sea. They showed a lack of faith in God and a lack of dedication and confidence in Moses. They were tested again (three days later) when they came to Marah and they needed water. The water of Marah was bitter and they murmured against Moses. When Moses cried out to God, he was shown a tree which he threw into the water and the water became sweet. Now that their food had been depleted, they attacked the motives of Moses and Aaron, accusing them of conspiring to commit “mass murder” by starving all of them to death. Do you think that they really believed that? No, but there is a mistaken idea that we can’t really get a person’s attention unless we attack them personally. This is the “mule-two-by-four” theory that says “to get the mule to do something, you must first get his attention by hitting him in the head with a two-by-four.”

We see, in this situation, another common misconception: “You can’t really get any action unless you overstate the situation.” Accusing Moses of wanting to kill them with hunger, in addition

to attacking his character, was an exaggeration of what they actually believed. Another overstatement was that they wished they had been killed in Egypt – at least, they would have died with full stomachs. They could remember the times when there would be a big kettle of meat cooking with plenty for everyone to eat. Those situations did not happen very often but that didn't matter since they wanted to make a point. This is another common misconception: "It was better in the good old days." Our present miseries and our past blessings tend to feed our lack of faith. At times, we are just as guilty of doing what the Israelites did when things didn't go well.

There was a legitimate concern: food was needed and it was right and appropriate that they noticed the need. The disappointing factor was their approach to handling the need for change. They chose to complain rather than simply looking to God Who is the Source for solving problems. What do we do today, when we see a legitimate need? Do we complain and expect "them" to fix it or do we ask God to show us how we can be used to help with satisfying the need? In other words, to whom do we look for solutions to problems?

### Provision – 16:11-15

<sup>11</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, <sup>12</sup> "I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.' " <sup>13</sup> In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. <sup>14</sup> And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. <sup>15</sup> When the people 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, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. Exodus 16:11–15 (ESV)

Why hadn't God miraculously given them bread and meat until this time? They had not needed it until now because God's provisions through natural resources were able to meet their need for physical nourishment. Many times, the special blessings God gives us arrive only when they are needed. Otherwise, these blessings are not appreciated. If the manna had been there before they ran out of other food, then it is likely they would have found it to be a nuisance.

We should be careful to not discount the function of God's blessings in the provisions we already enjoy every day. Since these everyday provisions do not literally "fall out of the sky" we have a tendency to think of them less in terms of "provisions from God" as we might think of something like manna. As Alexander MacLaren stated in a sermon on this passage, "Bread made of flour grown in another part of the world, baked by a baker and bought with money we earned as wages is as truly a gift from God as was the manna."

Their time in the wilderness was for training to become the nation that God intended for them to be. How does the "trainer" assess whether or not the training is working? Typically, there are tests and we see that in God giving them the gift of manna He was going to use that to "test them." The test results would show if these people would conduct their lives in accordance with God's instructions.

The test itself was fairly straightforward and very simple. It did not involve a lot of complicated steps that would be difficult to follow. The instructions for taking the test were simply to gather as much manna as each person in a household would need for one day and not save any for tomorrow except on day six and then gather twice as much and retain half of that for the next day. No manna would be given on day seven.

This test could be "self-graded." Did I do what God said? Yes or No? As is the case with most tests, there is something to be learned or a benefit derived from taking a test. This test was taken once each week and served to remind the Children of Israel that God was the Provider of their food and it also served to remind them that God can be trusted to know what is going to happen and

to make provisions for an interruption of the “daily bread.” Not only did the manna strengthen them physically, the way it was given worked to strengthen their faith.

Moses realized that he was not in control and he was not the source of power in that situation. As a result, he did not let the people's complaining and accusing rest on himself or Aaron. Earlier, he told the people, “Who are we, that you should murmur against us – it is God who is calling the shots and is in control – you are murmuring against Him.” This is a good attitude to have when people bring charges against us and complain about things over which we have no control. We must refuse to let it bother us. We did not create the situation and are not responsible for everything that happens. We do not need to take the weight of the world on our shoulders and struggle with every problem that is there. This can be the source of a lot of anxiety and stress that we do not need. Moses took the complaints and the problems to the Lord because he realized that his own resources were limited, but God is all powerful and He could provide whatever was needed. This is faith and trust in action. God did not disappoint Moses.

What was God's response to the grumbling or murmuring of the people? God was gracious in that the need which prompted the complaint was a real need. They had no meat or bread. Admittedly, it would have been better if they had simply requested that food be provided rather than going through all the verbal attacks and accusations directed toward Moses. God responded by providing meat and bread and did so with the same purpose that He brought the plagues against Pharaoh and Egypt – that they would know that He was the great I AM and their God.

The purpose of God giving them the meat and the bread was not only to provide nourishment but also to enable them to know that “I AM” was their God. How would they know? God told them what was going to happen (His promises) and then He did what He said. The events were miraculous which would indicate divine provision in a manner that could not be mistaken as being what is normal or typical. The ongoing life lesson that they should have been learning was that they were to depend upon God for everything, even their daily nourishment.

In the evening, quail was given to the people so that they could have meat in their diet. You would think it would be helpful for them if they were to have the strength for travel and for battle. It is thought that the quail were migratory birds that were returning to the northern latitudes in the spring and the Israelites were able to catch them. This provision of quail was for that day and was not an ongoing provision as was the manna. The spiritual significance of this could be that the quail represented provision that was of natural origin while the manna was of divine origin. The meat (flesh) from the earth may provide temporary nourishment (pleasure) but it is not sustainable, but the bread from heaven is available on a continuing basis.

They were to preserve a daily portion of the manna as a reminder to future generations of what God had provided for them in their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. This jar of manna was kept in the Ark of the Covenant. Not only was this a reminder of what had happened it also pointed to what was going to happen in the fulfillment of God's provision of salvation through Jesus.

#### Instructions – 16:16-19

<sup>16</sup> This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Gather of it, each one of you, as much as he can eat. You shall each take an omer, according to the number of the persons that each of you has in his tent.’ ” <sup>17</sup> And the people of Israel did so. They gathered, some more, some less. <sup>18</sup> But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat. <sup>19</sup> And Moses said to them, “Let no one leave any of it over till the morning.” Exodus 16:16–19 (ESV)

As we mentioned earlier, the gift of manna from heaven was going to be an opportunity to

see if the people were trustworthy – if they would be obedient. They were to gather what they needed for one day, except on the sixth day they were to gather twice as much. (This was in anticipation of the Sabbath observance.)

They were not to act out of greed nor hoard the food in anticipation of it running out, but were to trust God to provide on a day-by-day basis. Incidentally, if they did try to save the manna overnight, then it would spoil and not be good for them. This daily provision is reflected in the model prayer that Jesus gave to His disciples – “give us this day, our daily bread.”

The analogy of the daily provision of manna from heaven and the Christian’s daily devotional life is obvious. We need to spend time with the Lord and in His word each day and apply what we learn in our faith walk each day. Unlike the manna, we can make use of what we learn in subsequent days since the truth of God’s word does not have an expiration date.

The lessons from this experience are that we can make our needs known to God without complaining and blaming others. God does provide for our needs at the appropriate time in ways that are appropriate for the situation. God places restrictions on how we are to use His gifts to us. Every situation in which we find ourselves is an opportunity to evaluate our progress in becoming more like Christ as we respond to the situations of life. In every situation we can be confident that God is not only necessary for life itself, He is also sufficient for every need we have.

#### Further Provision – 17:1-6

<sup>1</sup> All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. <sup>2</sup> Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” And Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?” <sup>3</sup> But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” <sup>4</sup> So Moses cried to the LORD, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” <sup>5</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, “Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. <sup>6</sup> Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. Exodus 17:1–6 (ESV)

Apparently, the people had not learned the lesson to simply trust God to provide as He had done with the quail. Now, they grumbled for water. Once again, they blamed Moses. Once again, God was aware of their complaining and He gave Moses divine instructions to use his staff to produce water from a rock. In the previous episode, God had tested the Israelites, now they tested him by their lack of trust. Because of their actions, the place was called Massah and Meribah, ‘testing and quarreling’. Paul refers to this incident in 1 Cor. 10:3–4, suggesting that the pre-existent Christ was the one who sustained the people with food and water. This interpretation is reinforced by Jesus’ reference to Himself as being the Bread of Life and the Water of Life.

We notice also in God’s instructions to Moses that he was not to take action in the presence of all the people but simply to take a few of the elders with him to witness the miracle that God would do to meet the needs of the people. We saw earlier when Moses instructed the congregation of all of Israel regarding the Passover, he called the elders together to give them the message that would be passed on to all the people. These two occasions were teaching moments for Moses regarding delegation of responsibility to other leaders since he would soon find that he would be overwhelmed by questions and complaints coming from the people. Godly provision for this group of former slaves would not be limited to food and water but to every need. As we find ourselves free from slavery to the elements of this world, we too need to learn to look for and trust God to be our Providence.