

Wilderness Gleanings 4: The Manna

Exodus 16:1-8: “And they took their journey from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came unto the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of Egypt. And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: And the children of Israel said unto them, would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger. Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no. And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily. And Moses and Aaron said unto all the children of Israel, At even, then ye shall know that the LORD hath brought you out from the land of Egypt. And in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the LORD; for that he heareth your murmurings against the LORD: and what are we, that ye murmur against us? And Moses said, This shall be, when the LORD shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that the LORD heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: and what are we? your murmurings are not against us, but against the LORD.”

The children of Israel are now well into their wilderness journey – some 30 days had elapsed since leaving Egypt (16:1). The Wilderness of Sin was a barren place supporting only the sparse thorn bush, typical of the curse of the fall. Again the people murmur and long for the flesh pots of Egypt! But now it is not “what shall we drink?” but “what shall we eat?” Sinai was still ahead and God once more responds in pure grace. Through the mediation of Moses He supplies them in abundance with flesh in the form of quails in the evenings and bread from heaven in the mornings, which they called “manna,” meaning “what is it?”

At Marra the redeemed experienced the bitterness of the wilderness. Here in the wilderness of Sin they experienced its **barrenness**. There was nothing to satisfy their hunger and they murmured against God. Yet we know that there was ample food available even though they numbered some 2 million souls. We recall they left Egypt with abundant flocks and herds which would be able to supply them with meat and milk (Ex 12:38). These flocks and herds are mentioned at Sinai (Ex 34:3). Even when they were east of the Jordan near Jazar, we read that “the children of Reuben and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of cattle” (Num 32:10). So then, how do we explain their hunger? It was a yearning for a *particular type* of food – the food of *Egypt* – the world.

The quail (flesh)

The flesh recalls and yearns for the food garnished with leeks, onions and garlic. How quickly it disregards the pain of the *lash* in favour of the *lust*. How does God respond? First He gives them what they *want* – quail, the delicacy of the flesh – food in the evening. Later we read that quail was given in such abundance that it became loathsome. God sometimes allows the flesh to have its way in judgment. “I gave thee a king [Saul] in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath” (Hos 13:11). God may allow us to partake of the food of the world – its ways and its wisdom, to the extent that it becomes distasteful to us.

The manna

In His anger God gave them what they desired; but in grace He also provided what they *needed* – “bread from heaven” (Ps 78:25) – the food of the morning. *This* they had to gather and feed upon for their daily strength. It was given in measure – daily except for the Sabbath provision, which was gathered the day before (although the Sabbath had yet to be enshrined in the Law).

The Corinthian failure

The manna speaks of Christ having **come down** - our daily pilgrim food in the wilderness. The Lord constructs the lesson and sets the type of which He is the Antitype.

“Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (Jn 6:49:51).

A fresh appreciation of Christ come down is the food for our souls when passing through the wilderness experience; when the old man and the flesh are active. This was failure of *state* among the Corinthian believers. Though redeemed, Paul could not speak to them “as unto spiritual” (1 Cor 3:1); “Ye are yet carnal” (1 Cor 3:3). Accordingly they could not eat of the old corn of the land which speaks of Christ *risen* and *gone up*. Rather, they had to feed on wilderness food – the manna, Christ come down. And so Paul brings before them Christ come down as our Passover “sacrificed for us,” and exhorts them to “keep the feast”, the feast of life with “the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor 5:7, 8). They had lost sight of what Christ *was* – the manna, and so could not come practically into the truth of what Christ *is* – the old corn of the Land. Christ, as the heavenly manna come down was the antidote to the natural wisdom of the Greeks at Corinth, and a foil to the Jews in their pursuit of righteousness through the law. We cannot know what Christ is until we know what He was.¹ For this reason Paul determined to know nothing among the Corinthians “save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” And so we have in this epistle the feast of unleavened bread and its connection to Christ as our Passover and all that this means as to our practical walk (leaven is a type of evil).

In the case of the Corinthians it was “Peace I *leave* with you” – Christ come down, the provision for the wilderness; in the case of the Ephesians it was “My peace I *give* unto you” – the provision of inheritance associated with the risen and exalted Man who had made peace (Jn 14:27).

The manna (not the flesh of the quail) was stored within the Ark of the testimony as a generational reminder of God’s grace and providential glory. “And Moses said, This is the thing which the LORD commandeth, Fill an omer of it to be kept for your generations; that they may see the bread wherewith I have fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you forth from the land of Egypt” (Ex 16:32).

Our portion

There are three practical observations here. It was a personal responsibility to gather. “This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded, Gather of it every man” (Ex 16:16). We have here a gracious provision, the appropriation of which demands personal responsibility. Every man is to gather – morning by morning (Sabbath excepted). And gather he must if he is to overcome the deprivation of the wilderness and defeat the flesh. How vital for us to make time to meditate daily on the Word of God – morning by morning, feeding on Christ and what He has done. It was “according to his eating” (Ex 16:16). He was to gather in a measure what he needed. It may be the milk or the meat, but “He that gathered little had no lack.”

It was a daily gathering. It could not be stored lest it become stale and of no nutritional value. Such is our daily dependency from God in His provisions of grace. Yesterday’s grace will not suffice for today.

¹ This explains the gross presumption and poverty in profane commentary on what Christ *is* that comes from all who do not personally know what Christ *was*.