

**THE MERCY OF GOD UPON A MURMURING NATION**

Moses - Part 10

Exodus 16

**Intro:** As we come to Exodus 16 (and actually to the last verses of Exodus 15), we find them doing what they did over and over again as they moved from Egypt to Canaan: they were complaining; they were murmuring. They were dissatisfied with Moses and Aaron as their leaders because they were experiencing something that they did not have to worry about in Egypt. At the end of chapter 15, it was water that they were worried about. In chapter 16 it was food! And there was a certain reasonableness about their complaining because it was no small job to provide water for a group of probably, as I have been saying, a million and a half or two million people. And feeding such a group would have even been a greater problem. They brought some food with them when they came out of Egypt, but now that was all gone. And so now they wondered, as we often say about people who do not have enough to live on, “they wondered where their next meal was coming from.” We read about them traveling through a “wilderness,” but a better and accurate substitute for the word “wilderness” would have been *desert*, because they actually were going through a vast desert.

So we can say without giving it a lot of thought, that they were justified in being overly concern about where they were going to get water and food for such a large crowd. But were they justified in what they did. Let us stop for a few moments to review what they had been through

First, when Moses got back in to Egypt, the Lord brought upon Egypt plagues that were devastating to the people, and finally the Lord delivered them from Egypt. That was truly a miracle.

Next the Lord led them in a way that have never been known before. A pillar of cloud led them by day, and a pillar of fire by night. And what was most wonderful about that cloud was that the presence of the Lord was in the cloud. So the Lord had not turned them over to Moses and Aaron, but the Lord Himself was going to be with them for the whole journey.

Second, as they left Egypt, they moved toward the Red Sea and soon found themselves in what appeared to be a trap from which they could not escape when they saw that they were being pursued by the Egyptian army.

But the Lord miraculously opened up a way *through* the Red Sea, an event which had never taken place before.

But when the Egyptians saw what the Israelites had done, they attempted to do the same thing. But as they all got into that passage through the Red Sea, the Lord told Moses to hold his staff out over the sea, the waters came together, and the whole Egyptian army was drowned in the sea. But before all of that happened we learned from chapter 14, verses 11 and 12, that the people complained against Moses. And verse 12 in particular tells us that *even before they left Egypt*, and evidently because of the plagues, the people had told Moses to let them alone, saying that it would be better for them to stay in Egypt serving the Egyptian than to go out into the desert and die there. How often we all anticipate troubles of our own making.

But the point is, that the people had seen evidence after evidence that the Lord was taking care of them, but when any new crisis arose, instead of trusting the Lord to meet their needs once again, they murmured and complained against Moses and Aaron, but actually their rebellion (because that is what it was), was against the Lord!

Now we could be very critical of the children of Israel except for one thing: we so often do what they did! But perhaps our unbelief at times is more inexcusable than theirs was, because we have several thousands of years more to look back upon than they did to see the wonderful works of the Lord!

As the Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians, was reviewing the time that we are studying here in Exodus, he spoke about the murmuring of the children of Israel, and then he said this in 1 Corinthians 10:11,

11 Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

And in his epistle to the church at Rome we find these words in Romans 15:4:

4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

The Israelites were to learn from the past, *and so are we!* That is one major reason for reading the Bible. We may not be seeing the same kind

of miracles that the children of Israel saw, or even that the people saw in those wonderful days when our Lord was here upon earth. But we must remember that God is the same. Jesus Christ is the same. And the Holy Spirit is the same. And so just as the Lord was able to take care of all of His people in the days of Moses, He is able to take care of us today, whatever that might take. Remember those wonderful words that Moses spoke to the children of Israel shortly before his death. He said a lot of wonderful things, but I am referring to his words recorded in Deuteronomy 31:8. This is what you will find in that verse:

8 And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed (Deut. 31:8).

The Lord didn't fail Israel at any point in their history, and He will not fail us. We can count absolutely on that.

We learn in Exodus 16 that a new situation had arrived which neither Moses, nor Aaron, nor any of the children of Israel, had faced before. New situations often frighten us. We need to be looking to the Lord all of the time, but it is especially important when some new situation appears in our lives. BUT, that is the very time when we are likely to fail, and murmur, rather than trust the Lord.

What was the situation and the problem that the children of Israel faced here in Exodus 16? It was a very important problem, a problem which, as far as Scripture is concerned, no one had paid much attention to. And yet how to feed a large number of people like that was a massive problem to the Israelites. They could not see how such a need could possibly have been met. But with the Lord nothing is impossible.

Although we have been talking about the need, let us see what the Scriptures have to say about it.

### **I. THE NEED OF THE PEOPLE (Ex. 16:1-3).**

The people felt that the need was so great that no one could meet it, and so they were going to die! And they complained to Moses and Aaron. But notice that we don't have any response from either Moses or Aaron. Why? Because they did not know what to tell the people. Instead, the Lord spoke immediately to tell Moses what He was going to do to meet the needs of the people. And what an amazing revelation He gave to Moses – a provision that had never been made before.

We are always looking for God to work as we have seen Him work before, and if we cannot see similar circumstances, we conclude that our need cannot be met. But the book of Exodus teaches us that God has a variety of ways in which He can, and does, work.

## **II. THE LORD'S PROMISE (Ex. 16:4-10).**

Note the sequence here.

First, the Lord spoke to Moses, making a promise (vv. 4-5). And what an amazing promise it was. Never before in the history of man had the Lord done such a thing. He would provide, but they were to gather.

Second, Moses and Aaron spoke to the people (vv. 6-8). Notice that the way in which the Lord would provide for them, was to be a means of teaching them that this all was the Lord's doing, not Moses'!

Third, Moses had Aaron tell the people the first thing that they were to do (vv. 9-10). The main problem that the people had was that as they faced their need, they had forgotten the Lord. They knew that neither Moses nor Aaron could meet their need. But that was not what the Lord had called Moses and Aaron to do. That was a work which only the Lord could perform. And so in a special way their attention was focused upon the Lord.

## **III. THE LORD'S PROMISE FULFILLED (Ex. 16:11-26).**

Notice again what the Lord wanted to teach them. See verse 12 at the end of the verse. The emphasis is upon the words "I" and "your" - "And ye shall know that I am the Lord your God."

The Lord had promised them flesh to eat at night, and bread to eat in the morning. In the case of the bread, they had never seen such a thing before, and so they called it "manna," which meant, "What is it?"

They were to gather as much as a man could eat, called in verse 16, "an omer." Expositors differ as to what manna and omer mean, but the best idea seems to be that the people did not know what to call it even though the Lord had called it "bread." And the idea of the "omer" seems to be *what one man could eat*. When the gathering was finally done, some gathering more than they needed, and others gathering less, what was

gathered was put together, and the result was that everyone had as much as he or she needed to satisfy his or her hunger. So the Lord was mindful of each one's personal needs.

But the Lord was teaching His people to look to Him for the supply of their needs on a daily basis. Some tried in their unbelief to keep the manna over from one day to the next, but they found on the second day that what they had saved was wormy, and so unuseable.

Another thing that they learned was that if they waited too long to get out to gather the manna, when the sun came up and it got hot, the manna melted.

There was one exception about the daily provision. On the sixth day the Lord gave them twice as much as they normally would need so that they would not have to go out on the Sabbath, the seventh day, to gather manna.

The Lord did it this way, not only to teach them about Himself, but to test the people as to whether or not they would obey Him, doing exactly as He told them to do. See the last part of verse 4.

#### **IV. THE UNBELIEF OF THE PEOPLE (Ex. 16:27-31).**

We don't know how many were guilty of disobeying the Lord, but "some" did. Disobedience is always a sign of unbelief. But at least for the time, this problem was solved, and the people rested on the Sabbath as He intended that they should. We see how prone the people were to do something different from what the Lord told them to do. And we need to recognize that we have that same tendency in our own hearts.

#### **V. THE POT OF MANNA (Ex. 16:32-36).**

The chapter closes with the Lord telling Moses that there was one exception to the law against keeping the manna. An omer of the manna was to be kept as a reminder of the way in which the Lord fed His people through all of the years that they were in the desert. We read about this in Hebrews 9:3-4:

3 And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all;

4 Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant

overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant (Heb. 9:3-4).

What a wonderful story this is of the faithfulness of God toward His people! When the Lord saw how the Lord would provide for His people day by day, they should never have doubted Him about anything. *And, in spite of the unbelief of the children of Israel at Kadesh Barnea when they refused to go into the land, the Lord kept providing for His people in this way for forty years. In fact, when the people refused to believe that the Lord would give them the land, that was only a series of some ten times when the people had rebelled against the Lord. He continued to be faithful to them even though they were continually murmuring against Him.* The faithfulness of the Lord should not encourage our unfaithfulness to Him, but it should cause us to seek to be faithful to Him instead of continually disobeying Him and rebelling against His will.

**Concl:** The Bible tells us that the Lord did not continue to provide manna for His people after they got into the land. Then they ate of “the old corn of the land” (see Joshua 5:11-12), and eventually of the fruit of their own labors as they planted seed and harvested their crops. But the Lord wanted to teach them that day by day He would meet their needs. And He was doing it, that is, supplying their needs, even when they planted their crops. Only He was doing it in a different way. Later when the Lord was teaching His disciples how to pray, you will remember that one of the requests that He taught them to bring to the Lord, was, “Give us this day our daily bread.” And He is still doing this, not only for us, but for all people everywhere. That is why, before you eat your dinner today, you ought to bow your head and thank Him for the food that has been placed before you. Some-one in the family worked for the money to buy the food, but still it has come from Him.

But before I close, I want to make another application of this chapter. God has taught us in His Word that we are to depend upon Him day by day for our food, but He has also told us this, that “man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live” (Deut. 8:3b). When the Devil tempted the Lord by asking him to turn stones into bread, the Lord quoted to him from this verse in Deuteronomy. And He said to the Devil, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4; also, Luke 4:4). And yet from those ancient

times during Moses life, as well as before Moses and up to the present time, most people have felt that all they need is food for their bodies. And we have concentrated on preparing food in as many ways as we can to satisfy our physical needs. As a result one of the biggest problems that Americans face is that we weigh too much because we eat too much, and yet at the same time we starve ourselves spiritually because we are not feeding our souls on the Word of God.

Jeremiah has given us a good statement about this. In Jeremiah 15:16 we read these words:

16 Thy words were found, and I did eat them ; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts.

Eating the Word is not tearing pages out of our Bibles, putting pages into our mouths, and swallowing them. Eating the Word is reading it, seeking to understand it, and then doing what it says. And we start eating it with the Gospel. It is through the Gospel that we receive spiritual life, and it is by all of God's Word that we are the people of God learn about Him, and learn to live so that we can please Him.

Exodus 16 gives us a lot of wonderful examples of what is involved in feeding upon God's Word. We need the Word daily. We need it at the beginning of each day, in the morning. God has provided it for us, but we need to gather it. We begin the day with it, and end the day with it, so that all day long we are being strengthened by it.

We are all going to spend eternity in one of two places, either in heaven, or in hell. There are only two possibilities, just two. If you can be satisfied just by what you take into your body, you ought to be very, very alarmed. You are overlooking the fact that you are an eternal soul. Do nothing about it and your destination is hell. And there is not possibility of reversing that after we die. But if you realize that you cannot live by bread alone, but that you need God's Word for your soul, you must realize also that it is only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that the Bible is going to become for you meat and drink for your soul. And that then you won't be able to live without it.

And for those of us who are here today – if we can take our Bibles home, put them where we always keep them, and never look into them until another Sunday comes around, then we need to be concerned, deeply and greatly concerned about our souls. You and I are going to need food for

our bodies until we die. Then we aren't going to want it, or need it, anymore. But, on the other hand, if I can live day after day without the Bible, it is because I am spiritually dead, and I need God's gift of eternal life. Eternal life can be ours only by trusting the Lord Jesus Christ. If you have eternal life, you are not going to be able to live without God's Word.

May the Lord give each one of us the wisdom to know where we stand in our relationship with Him. And if we have none, may He give us not rest in our souls until we find life, eternal life, through faith in Christ Who died to save sinners from their sin, and to give them a life which has to be nurtured by God's Word, and cannot be satisfied without it.