

“REVIVE #3: MANNA AND WATER”

(Exodus 16:2, 11-15 and 17:1, 6-7)

© 2023 Rev. Dr. Brian E. Germano

[Cornerstone UMC.; 9-17-23]

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1. [11am ONLY... Read CEB Text: Exodus 16:2, 11-15 and 17:1, 6-7 and Pray].
2. We're in the midst of a sermon series called **REVIVE**, using the story of Israel's exodus from Egypt to teach us lessons about what it will take for us to experience personal and corporate revival -- for us, like them, to find (and live in) our own “promised land.”

A--So far, we've been reminded that revival not only requires us to answer God's *CALL* and to trust God's *PRESENCE*.

B--And in today's two short Bible stories from Exodus 16 & 17, we're reminded that it will also require us to *trust in & claim God's PROVISION* for the things that we need.

[9am ONLY... Listen to its words, “16:2 *The whole Israelite community complained against Moses and Aaron in the desert. ... 11 The LORD spoke to Moses, 12 “I’ve heard the complaints of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat. And in the morning you will have your fill of bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.’” 13 In the evening a flock of quail flew down and covered the camp. And in the morning there was a layer of dew all around the camp. 14 When the layer of dew lifted, there on the desert surface were thin flakes, as thin as frost on the ground. 15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” They didn’t know what it was. Moses said to them, “This is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. *** 17: 1 The whole Israelite community broke camp and set out from the Sin desert to continue their journey, as the LORD commanded. They set up their camp at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.... 6 [The Lord said] I’ll be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Hit the rock. Water will come out of it, and the people will be able to drink.” Moses did so while Israel’s elders watched. 7 He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites argued with & tested the Lord, asking, “Is the Lord really with us or not?”]*

3. To understand the meaning here, let's look at each of the two items that God provided for the people during their wilderness wanderings.

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4. First, Verses 11-15 describe how God provided "**BREAD**" for the people of Israel to eat after they'd been complaining about a shortage of food.

A--And the morning after those complaints, they awoke to find a strange, thin white substance covering the ground after the dew had dissipated.

1--Not knowing what it was, in Verse 15, they ask Moses "*What is it?*" (which, in Hebrew, is "*man-hu*", or "*man-na*"), ¹ and Moses replied that it was "*the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.*"

2--And sure enough, it was found that the substance could be baked or boiled to form bread, and though we didn't read it, Vs.31 tells us that, as a tongue-in-cheek acknowledgement of their own inquisitive nature, "*The Israelite people called it manna. It was like coriander seed, white, & tasted like honey wafers.*"

B--Now, there have been numerous explanations given as to exactly *what* this manna was -- was it dried plant sap from a kind of ash tree grown in the area? or a type of honeydew excreted by bugs that ate the sap? ² or was it truly a unexplainable miracle?

C--Well, regardless of *what* it was, it appeared *each morning* for the people to pick up and use *daily* to be sustained physically throughout their wilderness wanderings, right up until after they crossed the Jordan River and entered the "promised land", where Joshua 5:12 tells us that the manna ceased appearing just as suddenly as it had begun.

5. So what about the story of the provision of **WATER** from the rock in Exodus 17?

A--As with their hunger, the people of Israel were in physical need of water to drink. So, God told Moses to stand and strike a rock at Horeb with his staff. And the result was a spring of water gushing forth -- a source that, according to the apostle Paul, may have followed them in some fashion throughout their *entire* wilderness wanderings. ³

B--Now, this miracle may not require as much imagination to explain as manna, for we now know that even in dry, arid regions, pockets of water can reside just beneath the surface, and may need only a slight jarring -- such as the striking of a staff -- to rupture that surface and allow the water to escape. ⁴

C--But a fixation on HOW this happened again misses the fact that this is *not* a story of *science*, but of *THEOLOGY* --written NOT to answer *How & What*, but *Who & Why*:
 1--The WHO, of course, is God, maker of heaven and earth (including the rock).
 2--The WHY is that God loves His people enough to want to provide for their needs, especially in their journeys through experiences of "wilderness."

6. So, in the midst of the "shortages" that we face in our own personal and corporate "wildernesses," what is it about God's provision, renewal and revival that we learn from these two stories? ⁵ Well, in the time we have left, let me highlight two simple ones.

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7. First, **God's UNEXPECTED provision is given precisely for the time(s) we need it.**

A--In these scriptures, remember that the miraculous manna and water were provided for the people of Israel not *before* the exodus, not *after* they reached the "promised land," but *only* during their extraordinary "wilderness wanderings."

B--What this tells me is that we can trust God to provide grace and provision precisely IN and THROUGH those extraordinary and challenging seasons and experiences in life when the "ordinary" provisions and "works" of our own hands just won't suffice --...

1--...Seasons and experiences such as... during pandemics, times of racial unrest, natural disasters, unemployment, church-divisions, separation, divorce, health challenges and illness, the loss of a loved one, and many others.

2--Yes, we humans can sometimes take care of *ourselves* and our *own* needs, -- there are times that we *can* be self-sufficient and "pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps!"

3--But there are *other* times where own strength falls short, & we find ourselves in physical, emotional, mental or spiritual want -- and it's in *those* times and "seasons" of life that (if we choose) we can trust God to take care of us. ⁶

C--In The Upper Room devotional guide from a little over a week ago (Sept. 8, 2023), there was a devotional which shared a great example of what I'm talking about.

Written by a man from Sri Lanka named Shantha Rosa, he wrote...

Several years ago, I was employed in a school administration office. One day I had only enough money for my commute to the office. Because I had no money to buy breakfast, I continued working at my desk rather than joining the others who left for the canteen.

Suddenly I heard a voice behind me, and I turned to see a friend of mine who was a pastor. I was surprised to see him at school. He invited me to join him for breakfast in the canteen where he paid for my meal, gave me some extra money, and offered me a pair of shoes. I could not believe it! My shoes had holes in them. When I asked him what prompted him to extend all these kind gestures, he said that he felt called to do so.

This incident occurred seven years ago, and it led me to have complete trust in God for all my needs. Presently, I am a student at a theological college, and I believe my friend's generosity was the beginning of God's calling upon me to serve in ministry full-time. God can provide for our needs in surprising ways. ⁷

D--If we'll trust God, you see, He will give us *what* we need precisely *when* we need it!

8. Today's second lesson is specifically from the story of the manna, which Verses 19-21 (not read) tell us was to be collected *daily* and NOT stored, lest it spoil.

A--Well, what this tells me is that ***we must learn to trust God for DAILY provision, rather than worrying too much about the far future.***

B--When you and I go through times of "wilderness," we tend to want to be "in control" of everything -- knowing our path ahead & having enough "stuff" for the journey.

C--But both of these stories (the manna one in particular) tell us that to follow God means we have to trust Him to provide, sustain & guide us *daily*, even when we *don't* have a plan mapped out, or enough provision in storage -- how does the Lord's Prayer put it? "*Give us this day our daily bread...*" ⁸

1--Now, I'm NOT saying that we don't need to plan for the future at all -- No. As has been said, "*To fail to plan is to plan to fail!*"

2--What I *am* saying, though, is NOT to let our plans for the *future* dictate our trust in God in the *present*.

(a) When Trish & I got married, *our* plan was to have at least 2-3 children (we even had names picked out!)

(b) Life had a *different* plan. Yet through that, God was with us, providing what we needed at every stage along the way, & the result is that our *one* daughter & family are one of the greatest blessings of our lives!

3--So, the advice here is... hold the future *lightly*, and hold God's hand *tightly*!

9. Now, there are other lessons to be learned from these two stories ⁹ (read these in my sermon endnotes). However, the two I've shared today, I think, are the vital ones to remember: (#1) whatever we face, God will provide our needs *for that situation/time* if we'll trust Him to do so; and (#2) our trust in Him should be for *daily* provision, rather than worrying about our needs for too far into the future.

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11. So, what challenge, "shortage," or "want" are you facing today as you travel through your "wilderness" journeys?

A--Whatever they are, today's stories remind us that we can, indeed, trust God to provide for our needs -- ...

B--...that if we will stop our complaining and instead *trust* in the Lord, He will provide the "manna" and "water" that will enable us to get through the barren "desert" and "rocks"/hard places of our lives.

C--I love how the MESSAGE version of Psalm 23:1 puts it: "*God is my shepherd! I don't need a thing.*"

D--[11am Service ONLY... And the chorus of the old hymn by Civilla Martin echoes this well when it says:

*"God will take care of you through every day o'er all the way
He will care for you; God will take care of you."* ^{10]}

12. [PRAYER] *“O God, in the midst of the challenging situations and circumstances of our lives, we -- like the people of Israel -- are often a stubborn people, quick to complain about what we don't have. Forgive us for our lack of faith, impatience, and the shortness of memory regarding how you've provided for us in the past. As you used the lesson of the manna and water from a rock to remind the people of Israel to trust in you for provision in their journey through the wilderness towards the Promised Land, so help us, as well, to remember to trust in you -- Jehovah-jireh, God our Provider -- for miraculous provision through the “wilderness journeys” of OUR lives, as well. Help us remember that you are our Good Shepherd, who's desire is to provide our needs in life -- not always our wants, but definitely our needs. So, help us to trust you to do that, and to open our spiritual eyes to see HOW that provision will be given, including seeing it in ways that we don't always recognize. Help us to look to you to take care of us ‘through every way, over all and ever way’ that we travel in life. In the name of Jesus, we pray, Amen.”*
13. [SUGGESTED 11am CLOSING HYMN: UMH#130, *God Will Take Care of You*]

ENDNOTES:

¹ This Hebrew practice illustrates the tendency of humans to sometimes name strange things using a question as the name. Consider, for example, the official name of the mascot of the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, "Whatizit" ("Izzy" for short; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Izzy_\(mascot\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Izzy_(mascot))), or even the popular chocolate, peanut and caramel candy bar called "Whatchamacallit" (<https://www.hersheyland.com/whatchamacallit>).

² *"A favored theory on what the Israelites called manna is the sap of a tamarisk tree. In Calabria and Sicily, Italian farmers cut the bark of the flowering ash (Fraxinus ornus) to get the dried sap, the only domesticated form of manna. Italian apothecaries used it for centuries as a laxative, and other mannas have been used for medicinal purposes"* (From the NY Times article "Ancient Manna on Modern Menus" at <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/09/dining/09manna.html#:~:text=The%20favored%20theory%20on%20what,only%20domesticated%20form%20of%20manna>).

"The manna of European commerce comes chiefly from Calabria and Sicily. It drops from the twigs of a species of ash during the months of June and July. At night it is fluid and resembles dew, but in the morning it begins to harden. The manna of the Sinaitic peninsula is an exudation from the "manna-tamarisk" tree (Tamarix mannifera), the el-tarfah of the Arabs. This tree is found at the present day in certain well-watered valleys in the peninsula of Sinai. The manna with which the people of Israel were fed for forty years differs in many particulars from all these natural products" (From the article "Manna" in Easton's Bible Dictionary).

"Scholars who favor a naturalistic explanation of this mysterious substance, which later interpreters would call the “bread/food of angels” (Ps 78:25; Wis 16:20), argue that the manna is the excretion of an insect that is absorbed by the tamarisk tree and yields yellowish-white globules, which can be cooked to make bread—an occurrence apparently called in Arabic" (From the article "Manna" in the New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible).

³ Paul alludes to this in 1 Corinthians 10:4, *"They drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ."* Read some interesting thoughts and comments on this in the article "Water from a Walking Rock" at <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/new-testament/water-from-a-walking-rock/>

⁴ For example, read the SciTech Daily article "*Getting Water From a Stone: How Life Survives in Extreme Environments*" at <https://scitechdaily.com/getting-water-from-a-stone-how-life-survives-in-extreme-environments/>, or the Progressive Planet article "*How Do You Get Water Out of a Rock?*" at <https://progressiveplanet.com/how-do-you-get-water-out-of-a-rock/>.

⁵ Scholars have pointed out that just as God provided provision and sustenance for the people of Israel in this story, Jesus also later provided sustenance for the crowds who followed him, marking parallels between the provision stories of Exodus 16 and similar stories about Jesus in the gospels. Read, for example, Matt 14:15-21; Mark 6:35-44; Luke 9:10-17, where we find Jesus providing food to the crowds who followed him (including the "Feeding of the 5000"). Particularly, in John 6:22-59, we find an in-depth exposition of the manna story when Jesus makes a connection between himself and the Bread from Heaven. Not only does Jesus provide the life-giving bread that comes from God, in Verse 35 of that chapter (John 6) Jesus identifies himself as the "*Bread of Life*."

⁶ Consider, for example, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NRSV), "*3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, 4 who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God.*"

⁷ Devotional "*Unexpected Generosity*", by author Shantha Rosa in The Upper Room devotional for September 8, 2023 at <https://www.upperroom.org/devotionals/en-2023-09-08>

⁸ Matthew 5:11.

⁹ For example, a third simple lesson is ***how God's provision is always an unearned GIFT***. There was nothing that the people of Israel had to do to get God to give them the manna or water. Sure, they complained, as you and I often do when we don't have what we think we need in life! But I don't think God gave them these things *because* of their complaints, but *in spite of them!* God provided *because* that is God's nature -- "*Jehovah-Jireh*," He is sometimes called in the Bible. And God provides for *us* today, as well, NOT because we are good or righteous enough, but *simply because* God loves and wants the best for us. In fact, in the Oxford English Dictionary, one of the definitions of "manna" is "*an unexpected or gratuitous benefit.*" As perhaps you've heard before, "*There is nothing we can do to make God love us more. And there's nothing we can do to make God love us less!*"

And fourth lesson in this story is ***how God always provides our NEEDS, but not always our WANTS***. In giving the people of Israel manna to eat and water to drink, He was providing for their essential *needs*, not necessarily their desired *wants*. And so it is with God's provision for us: He will always provide what we *need*; what we *want* is often another story, and is not always provided by Him. When I was starting out in college, I dated a young lady who (at the time) I thought for sure was "the one" for me. But after some difficult struggles in that relationship, it became clear that I was wrong about that. Yet, it was out of those painful experiences that I met my wife Trish, and she has been my constant blessing and joy ever since. You see, God knew what I *truly* needed more than I understood at the time!

¹⁰ Lyrics to refrain of hymn "*God Will Take Care of You*" by Civilla D. Martin, found in The United Methodist Hymnal, #130.