

Exegetical Notes, Exodus 16:1-36

“What Is It?”

Prepared by Charles H. Jensen, Pastor, Cornerstone Fellowship

101 Kyllies Road, Coatesville, PA 19329

610-384-1375

charleshjensen@aol.com

Exodus 16:1-36

Verse 1

The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt.

- The journey continues to the Promised Land. It is now one month since Israel left Egypt. (See Exodus 12:2,6,29,31)

Verse 2-3

In the desert the whole community grumbled and complained against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by YHWH’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”

- Again, as at Yom Suph and Marah, the Israelites are confronted with a problem. At both Yom Suph and Marah, God intervened to help the community of Israel in the face of overwhelming circumstances. In both cases, without the help of the Israelites, God solved the problem and delivered the people.
- Now Israel faces a new problem. Their food supply is running low and the desert land through which they passed had little to offer to solve the problem.
- So Israel did as they had done twice before, at Yom Suph and Marah. They grumbled and complained against the leadership of their community, Moses and Aaron. They said that it would have been better if YHWH had just killed them in Egypt instead of dying of starvation in the desert.
- A pattern of behavior has developed.

Verse 4-5

Then YHWH said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.”

- At Yom Suph (Exodus 14:13-14), Moses made a bold statement to Israel in the face of her grumbling and complaining declaring that YHWH would work on her behalf if she stood firm in her faith. At Marah, Moses cried out to God for help. Here, YHWH responds to the grumbling and complaining without any action from Moses.
- YHWH declares that he will rain down bread upon Israel each day and so solve the problem. However, at Marah he told Israel that they must listen to his word and do what he says and then they will see his blessing. Here God puts Israel to the test to see if they have heard his words and will do as he says. Specific instructions are given regarding the bread.
- The test is designed to show Israel the problem. They grumble and complain but they do not listen to the word of God and do what God says.

Verse 6-8

So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you will know that it was YHWH who brought you out of Egypt, and in the morning you will see the glory of YHWH, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?” Moses also said, “You will know that it was YHWH when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against YHWH. “

- Moses tells the people that YHWH has heard their complaining and will work on their behalf to solve the problem. He says that God will resolve the dilemma in such a way as to reveal his glory to Israel, once again.
- Moses also correctly identifies the real subject of Israel’s complaining. Her problem is not with the leadership God has appointed over the community but with God himself. Israel’s problem is her lack of faith in God to meet her various needs.

Verse 9-10

Then Moses told Aaron, “Say to the entire Israelite community, ‘Come before YHWH, for he has heard your grumbling.’” While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of YHWH appearing in the cloud.

- Apparently the cloud which led Israel during the day and which reminded the Israelites of God’s presence with them began to burn with visible flame. See Exodus 24:15-17. This happened while the community watched.

Verse 11-12

YHWH said to Moses, “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I AM YHWH your God.’”

- As he did with Egypt, God takes great pains to show the slow Israelites who he is. By caring for them, God attempts to show Israel that he is God. He will meet their need and then they will know who he is and that he cares for them.

Verse 13-15

That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread YHWH has given you to eat.”

- That very evening, quail came miraculously into the Israelite camp so that there was ample meat to eat. The next morning the ground was covered with white flakes. Israel did not know what the flakes were and said to each other, “What is it?” The Hebrew word for “what is it” is “manna.” Moses explained that it was the bread God sent them to eat from heaven. In John 6:41-58 Jesus calls himself the bread which came down from heaven and so the manna given to Israel in the desert becomes a type, or a symbol, of Jesus Christ.

Verse 16

“This is what YHWH has commanded: ‘Each one is to gather as much as he needs. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.’”

- God’s instructions are repeated.

Verse 17-18

The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. And when they measured it by the omer, he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed.

- Miraculously, God made it impossible for the people to do what he had told them not to do, although some tried. No matter how much or how little they gathered, everyone had exactly one omer of manna for each person who lived in his tent. They were forced to do exactly as God had said in this.

Verse 19-20

Then Moses said to them, “No one is to keep any of it until morning.” However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them.

- Again God speaks instruction to the people through Moses about not hoarding manna. It is unnecessary since God will supply the bread every day. God speaks and Israel is supposed to listen to his word and do what he says.
- However, some of the people disregard the instructions of the Lord and do as they please and as makes sense to them. They try to hoard manna.
- But God has made this impossible. When they try to hoard manna, it spoils and cannot be eaten.
- Remember that God is testing the people. He is trying to show them that if they listen to his words and do as he says, they will be blessed.

Verse 21-26

Each morning everyone gathered as much as he needed, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away. On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much -- two omers for each person -- and the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses. He said to them, “This is what YHWH commanded: ‘Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath, to YHWH. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.’” So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. “Eat it today,” Moses said, “because today is a Sabbath to YHWH. You

will not find any of it on the ground today. Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any.”

- God extends the test. In the midst of the old law, a new one is given. For six days each week there will be manna on the ground every morning. However, on the seventh day, there will be no manna. This is because the seventh day is to be a day of rest, a Sabbath. No manna will fall and no work is to be done among the Israelites. The food for the seventh day is to be prepared on the sixth day.
- The expectation is that Israel will listen to the word of God and obey his instructions.

Verse 27-30

Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. Then YHWH said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? Bear in mind that YHWH has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no one is to go out.” So the people rested on the seventh day.

- Once again, some the people failed to listen and therefore did not do as YHWH had instructed. God calls this failure to the people’s attention and patiently explains and reiterates the instructions.

Verse 31-34

The people of Israel called the bread manna. It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey. Moses said, “This is what YHWH has commanded: ‘Take an omer of manna and keep it for the generations to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the desert when I brought you out of Egypt.’” So Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar and put an omer of manna in it. Then place it before YHWH to be kept for the generations to come. As YHWH commanded Moses, Aaron put the manna in front of the Testimony, that it might be kept.

- Yet another instruction comes to Israel from God related to the manna. A jar of it is to be kept to remind future generations of God’s provision for Israel in the desert. This new instruction is given to Moses and it is immediately complied with. The jar of manna is immediately set aside according to God’s instructions. Moses’ action becomes an example for God’s reluctant people in every generation.

Verse 35-36

The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan. (An omer is one tenth of an ephah.)

- God's special provision for Israel lasted as long as it was needed.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *What Is It?* They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)