

BREAD OF LIFE TORAH STUDIES

"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger ..." John 6:35

EXODUS 16-17

Egypt behind them, the Children of Israel are now on a steep learning curve—learning to trust in the faithfulness of their God. They saw the waters parted and the Egyptians drowned in the sea behind them; rejoiced exuberantly with the *Song of Moses* on the other side; they came to the bitter waters of Marah, which were made sweet by the 'tree' that Moses cast into the water. *And there He tested them* to see if they would heed His commandments and keep all His statutes, and there he revealed Himself as *Yehovah Rapha*, the LORD their Healer. This brought them to the camp at Elim where they saw that *the righteous shall flourish like a palm tree*.

CHAPTER 16 - The Second Test—Manna from Heaven

And they journeyed from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came to the Wilderness of Sin¹, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they departed from the land of Egypt. Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. And the children of Israel said to them, "Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

"The specific time and place underscores the utmost importance of the coming events. This episode occurs exactly one month after Israel's deliverance from Egypt. However, this event does not concern freedom from slavery and bondage, but the liberation of the heart and mind from the demoralizing worry of obtaining one's daily sustenance. It was now essential for Israel to begin trusting that Hashem would provide their daily food ... Man must realize that is ultimately from God that his livelihood derives."²

We are again reminded that Jesus' teaching is not new but based on Torah: "Do not worry saying what shall we eat? Or 'What shall we drink? . . . Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added to you." (Mt. 6)

16:4-6 *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion (dabar/word) every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law (Torah/instruction) or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily."*

Concerning the gathering of the manna, Ex. 16:4 literally reads that they should "gather a word a day in its day." The emphasis in this chapter concerns God's specific command regarding the gathering of food. Yet, this should not allow us to neglect the principle that *man does not live on bread alone, but by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of God*. (Deut.8:3). Hence the Sages

¹ *Sin* is an Egyptian word meaning "clay". The word connotes a city of the ooze or mud. Pelusium (its Roman name) stood as a border-fortress, a place of great strength, on the frontier, protecting Egypt as regards to Syria and the sea. The only other use of this word in the Bible is found in Ezek. 30:15-16 I will pour My fury on Sin, the strength of Egypt; ... Sin shall have great pain...

² Elie Munk, *The Call of the Torah, Shemos*, p.201

understand this verse as alluding to spiritual sustenance. A person should exert the same effort to acquire Divine knowledge that he applies to material needs.³

Read verses 6-15 carefully, and note the repetitions of: 1) evening/morning in verses 6,8,12,13—they will receive quails in the evening and bread in the morning; and 2) “complaining” – (in the sense of obstinacy; a grumbling)

The Hebrew word for “quail” means ‘sluggish’, so-named from its fatness, so this could be referring to the ‘sluggishness’ of the people, which is manifesting in constant complaining against the LORD, who, the sixfold repetition assures us, has heard them (See also Num. 12:31-33).

Q. What might these repetitions be telling us?

Verse 16 reads: *The Children of Israel saw and said to one another, “It is manna, for they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “This is the bread that the LORD has given you for eating. “This is the thing” that the LORD has commanded . . .”* (“This is the thing” occurs in the same context in v.32). The word *Manna* means “What is it?” They called it manna because they had no idea what it was; it didn’t fit into any of their preconceptions. The ‘food’ that fell was like nothing they had seen before, much less eaten. They were to consume all that they gathered on the same day and leave none till morning lest it putrefy. (see also verse 24)

The people are told that the bread is not only to feed them, but it is a “test” to see if they will walk in obedience to their God (see also Deut. 8:2-3). Honouring the Sabbath is key to this test: v.22 *It happened on the sixth day that they gathered a double portion.*

The true bread of our lives comes not from earth but heaven.—only heavenly bread can fill our hungry souls. As bread is to our bodies so is the Word of God to our souls. We would all be familiar with the scripture quoted by Jesus himself during His temptation in the wilderness: “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’” (Mt. 4:4); and His declaration in John 6:35: “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

v.25 *And Moses said, eat that today; for today is a Sabbath for the LORD; today you shall not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but the seventh day is a Sabbath, on it there will be none.* Another threefold repetition, “today”, strongly emphasizes the Sabbath day, when they are to rest and consume what had previously been given and prepared.

The Torah is introducing a profoundly important teaching here, which points, not only to the importance of Sabbath for the Jewish people, but beyond to the Messianic age which will be “a day that is all Shabbat”. We might also recall that the day that the Children of Israel entered the Promised Land, the manna stopped falling. This may also allude to the Messianic Age when: “No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.” (Heb. 8:11)

When his disciples asked Jesus, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” he answered them, . . . *Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. (Jn.6:31-35)*

³ Ibid, p.209.

Jesus gave us “bread” as a pivotal sign of his presence with those who believe in Him. Here in this Exodus teaching, we see that the giving of manna from heaven is inextricably tied to the Sabbath rest.

Q. How do you understand this link and how does it relate to our faith in Christ?

The Sabbath is to be seen as a ‘gift’ from the LORD (v.29). It offers a break from the frantic rush of daily life, an opportunity for a person to draw aside, regain himself, and return to the life of the spirit. The word *Sabbath*, relates to the root, *return*, intimating a return to God and a concentration on one’s inner self. It also includes a return to and relaxing with family and friends, which are so important for our wellbeing. “The Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” (Mk. 2:27)

To some extent the entire Jewish religion depends on adherence to the single commandment of the Sabbath. Thus, the degree to which the Sabbath is observed determines the religious level of the nation.⁴

DISCUSS how the law of the Sabbath had become distorted in the Holy Land by Jesus’ day.

Q. How does the Law of the Sabbath relate to us as Christians who have entered the New Covenant? (Your reflections should encompass both practical and spiritual aspects.)

CHAPTER 17 – Water from the Rock

READ 17:1-4 The children of Israel moved on and pitched camp at Rephidim and there was no water for the people to drink. Again they turn on Moses and demand that he take care of their needs—again looking back to Egypt where life was more predictable. Moses cried out to the LORD.

⁵*And the LORD said to Moses, “Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. ⁶“Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.” And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.*

What questions come to mind from this passage, bearing in mind that they also point to fulfilment in Christ? For example: Why did the rock have to be struck this time, but when the people rebel later, God commands Moses and Aaron to ***speak to the rock before their eyes and it shall give its waters***, (Num. 20:8), not to strike it, as here.

Q. What is the significance of these two scriptures? (bear in mind that 1 Corinthians 10:4 explains that “the Rock was Christ.”)

*7 And he called the place Massah (tempted) and Meribah (contention), because the Israelites quarrelled and because they tested the LORD saying, “Is the Lord among us, or not?”
8. Now Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim.*

We need to see that the attack by the Amalekites is a direct result of their negative, contentious behaviour. The LORD seemed to excuse their complaining against Him previously, when they were hungry (v.6-15), but it seems they didn’t learn the lesson—they failed the test. Now God gives them a glimpse of what life is like without his protection.

⁴ Munk, *ibid* p.214.

Battle with the Amalekites – Exodus 17:8-13

Hebrew insight: “Is the LORD among us...? (*berkirbenu*) “The Hebrew word *berkirbenu* can mean two things. It can mean “among us” (in a spatial sense), but it can also mean “within us” (in a psychological sense). The real meaning of the battle against Amalek, as understood by the Mishna, is that it showed the inner, spiritual and emotional dimension of the Divine Presence. The Israelites won, not because God fought the battle for them, but because God gave them the strength to fight the battle for themselves. God was not “among them” but “within” them. That was the crucial change between before and after the crossing of the Reed Sea.”⁵

We read in Deut. 25:17 “*Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you were tired and weary; and he did not fear Elohim.*”

As the first to attack Israel after their deliverance from Egypt, the Amalekites were viewed as the epitome of all the powers of the world arrayed against God’s people. “Historically, every time Israel doubted and strayed from God, an Amalek loomed up before them. Punishment came very swiftly, and at the very place where the sin was committed. The place mentioned here, Rephidim, signifies this wavering faith.”⁶

This is Israel’s first battle. Previously, the message had been ‘stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.’ (Exodus 14:13). Now, the message to Joshua is ‘choose some of the men and go and fight the Amalekites.’ So who are the Amalekites? Amalek was descended from Esau and like Esau they also represent the carnal nature, which we see here rising up to hinder their walk with God through the wilderness. Thus this external battle with Amalek also represents an internal battle going on within us, and thus there are valuable lessons to be learned from this encounter

1. When Moses hands were raised Israel was stronger, when lowered, Amalek was stronger.
2. When he became tired, he sat on a stone. We need to rest upon Jesus in prevailing prayer. He is “the stone which the builders rejected” who “has become the chief cornerstone.” (Ps.118:22)
3. Aaron and Hur, ascended the hill with Moses and supported his hands *so they remained in faithful prayer until sunset.* (see also Ex.24:14). What can we learn from this?
 - a. **Aaron** has been a co-actor with Moses from the beginning of his redemptive work. His name seems to have a composite meaning - from *mountain* (something high up, exalted) and *light*. He becomes the High Priest who is the only one able to enter the Holy of Holies on behalf of the people. As High Priest, Jesus intercedes for us before the Father. (Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:34) Hebrews 3:1 tells us Jesus is the high priest of our confession... Heb. 4:14 So, *let us hold fast our confession.* “To hold fast means to say something, then keep on saying it. Don’t back off. Don’t get discouraged.” “Satan uses every kind of pressure, every inducement, every lie - all with one aim: to get us to make the wrong confession. We defeat him, however, by maintaining the right confession.”⁷
 - b. **Hur** – a son of Judah. Translated as “white” linen in Esther 1:6 & 8:15.⁸

⁵ Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant & Conversation*, Exodus, p120.

⁶ Elie Munk, *The Call of the Torah*, p222.

⁷ <http://www.derekprince.org/Articles/1000086849>.

⁸ Hur is from the Tribe of Judah; Caleb is son of Hur, & Bezalel his grandson—an extremely significant bloodline.

4. ***Joshua weakened Amalek and it's people with the edge of the sword.***⁹

The Hebrew word for 'sword' comes from a root meaning to destroy, lay waste; and the word translated 'edge,' *peh*, literally means "mouth".

Ephesians 6:7 tells us that the sword of the Spirit, is the word of God. (We might recall that Jesus Himself used the Word of God against the temptations of the enemy during His 40 days in the wilderness.)

The battle against the Egyptians was a divine act, not human one. But here the battle needed to be fought by the Israelites themselves. There is no hint of a miracle—the only hint of a supernatural presence is Moses' hands held aloft. Somehow they held the key to victory.

It is written, "As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning." Now, did the hands of Moses wage war or crush the enemy? Not so. The text signifies that so long as Israel turned their thoughts above and subjected their hearts to their Father in Heaven they prevailed, but otherwise they fell.¹⁰

God, the Mishnah implies, makes a difference not "out there" but "in here." Moses' hands merely pointed upwards. They directed the eyes, and thus the minds, of the Israelites to heaven. That gave them the courage, the inner strength, the hope and faith to prevail.

Q. Taking these insights into account, how do you understand lessons of the battle with Amalek? What is the lesson for us, and how do we appropriate this in our own life?

In Conclusion

Ex. 17:14-16 *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner. [Yahweh-nissi] He said, "For hands were lifted up to the throne of the LORD. The LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation."*

In contrast to Egypt, Amalek's final defeat was reserved for the distant future. Israel itself was still unprepared and immature, and Amalek's antagonism would be necessary for the completion of Israel's development and maturity. (Rabbi S. R. Hirsch)

The lessons from the battle against Amalek are so important that Moses is instructed to write it on a scroll as a memorial and make sure that Joshua hears it. Amalek is weakened, but not completely defeated in this battle. But the LORD gives a great promise that He will be at war with Amalek from generation to generation, and the day will come when he will *completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.*

Haman, in the Book of Esther, was a descendant of Agag, the king of the Amalekites. His edict is the final major effort in the OT period to destroy the Jewish people. Nevertheless, that spirit has endured to this day.

⁹ How interesting that the English word, "word" is embedded in the word 'sword'.

¹⁰ Mishna, *Rosh HaShana* 3:8