

The Book of Exodus

Lesson 9

Chapters 15 – 16

As Chapter 14 ended, it had taken at least 12 hours for the Israelites to cross the Red Sea in the night guided by the light of the column of fire. At daybreak, the Israelites watched as the walls of water collapsed on the Egyptian army in the middle of the seabed. They were drowned possibly as much as a mile below the surface of the sea. Israel had truly seen the power of the LORD and began to sing the following song.

Moses Leads the Song

Exodus 15:1a Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and said,

We do not know for sure how the people broke out in song. However, it had to be spontaneous. Because Moses was the leader, we can safely assume that Moses would sing a phrase and the people would repeat it. The word “sons” in this verse is better translated *people* because it does not mean just the male children of Israel. It means all the children of Israel. We do not know if they sang through the song one time or many; nevertheless, the message of the song was important enough to include in the Scripture. Because it is a song, it should be read and interpreted in its entirety as a song.

The Song

Exodus 15:1b "I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea. ² "The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; This is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will extol Him. ³ " The LORD is a warrior; The LORD is His name. ⁴ " Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea; And the choicest of his officers are drowned in the Red Sea. ⁵ "The deeps cover them; They went down into the depths like a stone. ⁶ " Thy right hand, O LORD, is majestic in power, Thy right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy. ⁷ "And in the greatness of Thine excellence Thou dost overthrow those who rise up against Thee; Thou dost send forth Thy burning anger, and it consumes them as chaff. ⁸ " And at the blast of Thy nostrils the waters were piled up, The flowing waters stood up like a heap; The deeps were congealed in the heart of the sea. ⁹ " The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; My desire shall be gratified against them; I will draw out my sword, my hand shall destroy them.' ¹⁰ " Thou didst blow with Thy wind, the sea covered them; They sank like lead in the mighty waters. ¹¹ " Who is like Thee among the gods, O LORD? Who is like Thee, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders? ¹² " Thou didst stretch out Thy right hand, The earth swallowed them. ¹³ "In Thy lovingkindness Thou hast led the people whom Thou hast redeemed; In Thy strength Thou hast guided *them* to Thy holy habitation. ¹⁴ " The peoples have heard, they tremble; Anguish has gripped the inhabitants of Philistia. ¹⁵ "Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed; The leaders of Moab, trembling grips them; All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. ¹⁶ " Terror and dread fall upon them; By

the greatness of Thine arm they are motionless as stone; Until Thy people pass over, O LORD, Until the people pass over whom Thou hast purchased.¹⁷ " Thou wilt bring them and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance, The place, O LORD, which Thou hast made for Thy dwelling, The sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established.¹⁸ " The LORD shall reign forever and ever."¹⁹ For the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his horsemen went into the sea, and the LORD brought back the waters of the sea on them; but the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea.

The song is straight forward and makes common sense; however, clarity is needed on a few points. The English states **"The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea."** The use of the word "into" could lead a person to understand that the LORD picked up the Egyptians and threw them into the sea which was not the case. The Egyptians willingly followed the Israelites onto the dry seabed in the midst of the walls of water. The English translation should say, "The horse and its rider He has hurled *in* the sea," thus giving it the understanding that when the waters collapsed on the soldiers, the Israelites tumbled in the bottom of the sea.

Another interesting point is found in the sentences, **"The flowing waters stood up like a heap; The deeps were congealed in the heart of the sea."** The waters did not simply stop flowing causing the waters to recede until the whole Gulf of Aqaba was drained. Rather, at the crossing, the waters parted and a path on the dry seabed came into view. The miracle in this event was that the water level of the Gulf of Aqaba did not rise or fall; literally, the breath of the LORD caused an opening in the sea with walls of water on either side. The Scripture correctly uses the word "congealed." We think of jello but a better example exists. The sea looked to them like cold, thick animal fat.

The song mentions the responses of the Edomites, Moabites and Canaanites. Surely they were not there to see the event but when they heard the report from the Egyptians, they responded exactly as the song states.

Miriam's Dance

Exodus 15:20 And Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took the timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dancing.²¹ And Miriam answered them, "Sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; The horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea."

This passage calls Miriam **"the prophetess."** Much has been made of this name and many commentators have stressed the modern interpretation of the word. It simply means that Miriam spoke up and led the women to join in the celebration with tambourines and dance. The Hebrew is the feminine form of the word that indicated a person who was speaking. It does not mean she had the ability to foretell the future.

To the Wilderness of Shur

Exodus 15:22 Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water.

Once on the eastern beach of the Gulf of Aqaba, Moses led the people into the wilderness of Shur. In the last lesson, we discovered that in the book of Numbers Moses called it the wilderness of Etham. We concluded that those coming out of Egypt would have called it the wilderness of Shur because it was east of the wall built at the edge of the Nile that protected Egypt's capital city. However, 40 years later, when writing the book of Numbers, Moses referred to the wilderness that was west of the mount of Etham. In either case, it was the same wilderness and it extended past the Gulf of Aqaba into the land of Midian. The real question to consider is "Did Moses lead them to the north or to the south to go to the mountain range of Mount Sinai?"



Map 21 Established trade routes that could have led the Israelites to Mount Sinai

Map 21 shows the established trade routes at the time of the crossing that the Israelites could have taken from the beach. Obviously, the quickest and easiest route would have been to go north to a junction with the current Hwy 5 and then travel south to Alsharaf and continue on Hwy 5 or take Hwy 15 before getting off the trade route and following a valley from the east or west to the foot of Mount Sinai. Both of these routes are marked with dashed lines on Map 21. Jebel al Lawz is the current name for Mount Sinai. "Jebel" means *mount*. "Lawz" means *laws*. Therefore, on current maps it is called the *Mount of the Laws*.

The route to the south of the beach was extremely rugged compared to that of the north, yet it was suitable for a journey. That route is marked with the solid line on Map 21. We must go into the next passages to discover the direction the LORD led Moses to take the people away from the beach.

Bitter Water

Exodus 15:23 And when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah. ²⁴ So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" ^{25a} Then he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree; and he threw *it* into the waters, and the waters became sweet.

Had the Israelites taken the northern route from the beach, they would have reached good drinking water at several stops within a day. Therefore, they could not have traveled for three days without finding water. Taking the southern route was a different story. It was a rugged route less traveled. Map 22 shows the approximation of the three-day journey to the south from the beach. At that location water could have been found that could have been considered bitter. A more accurate translation is *salty*. Wells and springs near sea water often becomes salty when the tide rises and sea water spills into the springs or wells. Eventually, the water becomes good as the springs dilute the salt water. A burnt piece of wood could be used to purify salty water. The charcoal would draw the salt and impurities out of the water.

We do not know the location of Marah. We do not know whether or not it is near the indicated location on Map 22. Moses named the place Marah but that does not mean that the name was accepted by the local people; it was the Israelite's name for the location.

Statute to Keep Commandments

Exodus 15:25b **There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them.** ²⁶ **And He said, "If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer."**



Map 22: Established trade routes that could have led the Israelites to Mount Sinai

The Israelites needed a new lesson, one that they could not have understood until they arrived at Marah and tasted the bitter water that was purified for them by the LORD. The lesson is in the last sentence, **"I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer."** Notice the words "I, the LORD am your healer." Perhaps you have heard a preacher mention the name *Jehovah Rapha*. Rapha means *healer* and it comes from this passage. The English word "LORD" in this passage is the Hebrew word *Jehovah*.

In this instruction, the LORD puts conditions on His promise to be the Healer. For Him to be the Healer, the people must 1) pay attention to His voice, 2) do what is right, and 3) keep His laws. Sadly, the Israelites will struggle with all three parts of this promise.

Elim with 12 Springs and 70 date palms

Exodus 15:27 **Then they came to Elim where there *were* twelve springs of water and seventy date palms, and they camped there beside the waters.**

Had Moses taken the Israelites to the north from the beach, they would not have found a location with twelve springs and seventy date palms to camp beside on their way to Mount Sinai. But

because they took the southern route, a modern location called Magna fits the description. On the modern Map 23, about four days out from the beach landing, the village of Magna exists. Just to its south is a place called the *Well of Moses*. It has 12 springs and many date palms. We might expect there to be many more date palms to have grown in more than 3,000 years since the exodus, and surely they have. In Map 23, notice also the trade route, modern road 8746. From the location of the 12 springs and 70 palms, route 8746 leads to modern Al Bad or the traditional *Caves of Jethro*.

It can be safely concluded that the *Well of Moses* located on Map 23 coincides with the biblical Elim. No other location on the north or south route matches the description.



Map 23: Magna, the Well of Moses (springs and palm trees *inset center*) and Al Bad (*Jethro's Caves in the inset right*)

Wilderness of Sin

Exodus 16:1 Then they set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt.

Somewhere on the journey from Elim to Mount Sinai, the Israelites entered into the wilderness of Sin exactly 30 days after leaving Egypt. We can conclude that the wilderness of Sin encompasses a mountainous region on either side of route 8746 in Map 23. To try to limit the area to that shown in the map is a mistake; a wilderness, such as that of Shur, Etham and the Red Sea tend to extend until reaching some natural barrier or change in terrain.

Grumbling in the Wilderness

Exodus 16:2 And the whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³ And the sons of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the LORD'S hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

How can it be that such a people as these Israelites who have been rescued by the LORD because of their cry for help, redeemed from the bondage by way of 10 plagues and many miracles, redirected through a sea to escape death imposed by a charging army and replenished by a bitter well made sweet dare to spout reservations against Moses and Aaron's leadership and request a reason for their removal from Egypt because of a temporary ravenousness moment? How shallow, ignorant, self-centered and insecure they were. For 430 years their people were told when to eat, what to eat, how to eat, and where to eat by the overlords in Egypt. There they could stand in line and fill a small bowl with meat boiled in a nasty communal pot and eat cheap bread to fill their empty bellies as they lived their lives directed by the desires of taskmasters. Yet, the wilderness where they lived with a God who met every need on their journey was worse to them. Thirty days out of Egypt and their trust was still in the past instead of the present miracle-working Savior.

Bread from Heaven

Exodus 16:4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction. ⁵ "And it will come about on the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily." ⁶ So Moses and Aaron said to all the sons of Israel, "At evening you will know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt; ⁷ and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, for He hears your grumbings against the LORD; and what are we, that you grumble against us?"

When the LORD says, "**Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you,**" it will be bread made from a product that was never on the earth before and was never on the earth again after the Israelites entered the Promised Land. Man was made from the earth and his life was sustained by food produced by the earth. This bread was different, it came from heaven. Whether or not this passage means from the throne of the LORD or simply from the sky makes little difference; it was new to the earth, only for the Israelites in the wilderness and was temporary food for them during the journey to the Promised Land.

The instruction was to "**gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them.**" No more and no less was to be gathered; in fact, the LORD would not allow them to gather more than they needed. When the LORD says, "**that I may test them,**" a whole new meaning is imposed on the use of this bread. It was proof of trust in Him as their Provider. Can they trust Him each day for their daily bread? Could they trust Him each day for their daily bread? Would they trust Him each day for their daily bread? Tomorrow matters nothing at all. Will they trust in Him today? Many years later the LORD will say to His apostles when He is teaching them how to pray saying, "give us this day our daily bread." The bread was not for yesterday or tomorrow. The question is now, "In whom will you trust for your daily bread today?"

The bread was to be collected from the first day of the week through the sixth, but not on the seventh. He said, "**on the sixth day, ... it will be twice as much as they gather daily.**" On the sixth day, they were to gather for the seventh. Six days they were to work for their food but on

the seventh day they were to rest. At this point in the story, not one grain had been provided for the bread; it would come the following morning.

“At evening you will know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt.” The miracles in the land of Egypt were not enough to gain the full trust of the Israelites and neither was the parting of the sea. Even though they saw and experienced those mighty feats, their hunger meant more to them now and they wished they were back in Egypt. The LORD saw fit to provide them with a daily reminder. We are not told yet what will be provided in the evening that will cause them to know that the LORD brought them out of Egypt, but that will be addressed in the next passage. However, when Moses says, **“in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD,”** it is a direct reference to the seed that they will find on the ground early the following day. Why was the LORD doing this for the Israelites? It was because **“He hears.”** The LORD always hears. No words are spoken that He does not hear. When the Israelites grumbled, He heard. When they rejoiced, He heard. When they cried, He heard. He heard them crying for help in Egypt, He answered their prayers. In this case, He heard them grumbling for food and He would answer their prayers. It was all the LORD’s doing, yet, the Israelites were directing their frustration toward Moses and Aaron; therefore, they asked them, **“What are we, that you grumble against us?”**

Meat in the Evening, Bread in the Morning

Exodus 16:8 And Moses said, ***"This will happen when the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening, and bread to the full in the morning; for the LORD hears your grumbings which you grumble against Him. And what are we? Your grumbings are not against us but against the LORD."***

The LORD was not going to make them wait until morning to provide them with food. In the same instructions as before, Moses said to the people, ***"This will happen when the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening, and bread to the full in the morning."*** The meat will come in the evening. (Evening in the Hebrew Scripture refers to our afternoon.) What meat? The Israelites had their livestock but they surely knew that those animals could not sustain them for very many days. The LORD would provide a different source of meat to prove to the Israelites that **“Your grumbings are not against us but against the LORD.”**

Appearance of the Glory of the LORD

Exodus 16:9 Then Moses said to Aaron, ***"Say to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, 'Come near before the LORD, for He has heard your grumbings.'"*** ¹⁰ And it came about as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.

Just as Aaron had been the spokesman in Egypt to Pharaoh, now he has become the spokesman to the Israelites. Aaron drew them near and directed their attention so that **“They looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.”** The

wilderness was to the east of them and some commentators believe that they saw an extra glow radiating from the cloud that was directing their journey.

Instruction for Evening and Morning

Exodus 16:11 **And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹² " I have heard the grumbings of the sons of Israel; speak to them, saying, ' At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'"**

The LORD becomes more specific with His timing as to when they will eat the meat and bread by saying, **“At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread.”** Twilight occurs as the sun disappears beyond the horizon. Taking this into account, the meat that the LORD will provide will come in the afternoon to be prepared for the meal at twilight. They still did not know the kind of meat.

Quail at Evening, Dew at Morning

Exodus 16:13 **So it came about at evening that the quails came up and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴ When the layer of dew evaporated, behold, on the surface of the wilderness there was a fine flake-like thing, fine as the frost on the ground.**

The people had to wait for the evening and the morning. Then in the evening, **“the quails came up and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp.”** The camp would gather the quail in the afternoon and have them for dinner at twilight.

Dew is not common to that part of the world; it does occur, but rarely. We think of dew as being the condensation that occurs with the change of temperatures as night turns to day. Dew occurs when the moisture in the air is so condensed and close in relationship to the temperature that it turns into droplets of water. As the heat increases, the temperature rises and the dew evaporates. Frost occurs when the dew point is near freezing. The passage says, **“When the layer of dew evaporated, behold, on the surface of the wilderness there was a fine flake-like thing, fine as the frost on the ground.”** As the dew evaporated it left behind the flake-like thing, never seen before and never seen again after the Israelites entered the Promised Land.

The Unknown

Exodus 16:15 **When the sons of Israel saw *it*, they said to one another, " What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, " It is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat. ¹⁶ "This is what the LORD has commanded, 'Gather of it every man as much as he should eat; you shall take an omer apiece according to the number of persons each of you has in his tent.'"** ¹⁷ **And the sons of Israel did so, and *some* gathered much and *some* little. ¹⁸ When they measured it with an omer, he who had gathered much had no excess, and he who had gathered little had no lack; every man gathered as much as he should eat.**

"What is it?" Later in this chapter we will discover that the Israelites called the flake-like seeds manna. They were not creative in their naming of the food because manna is the Hebrew word that means "What is it?"

The instruction was **"you shall take an omer apiece according to the number of persons each of you has in his tent."** What is an omer? It was the smallest measurement for dry goods for the ancient Hebrews. It amounted to about three quarts; therefore, each person required about three quarts of manna each day to make the amount of bread they would eat.

The result of their collection process was interesting. **"When they measured it with an omer, he who had gathered much had no excess, and he who had gathered little had no lack."** In other words, no one could collect too much and no one could collect too little. Here is another miracle of the LORD. Whatever was collected was exactly the amount allowed and required.

The Rule

Exodus 16:19 **And Moses said to them, "Let no man leave any of it until morning."**

²⁰ **But they did not listen to Moses, and some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul; and Moses was angry with them.** ²¹ **And they gathered it morning by morning, every man as much as he should eat; but when the sun grew hot, it would melt.**

All the food had to be consumed on the day it was gathered or, if **"some left part of it until morning, ... it bred worms and became foul."** The daily bread was for each day alone, nothing could be saved until the next day, at least Sunday through Thursday.

Dew does not stay on the ground very long after the sun rises. The Israelites had to go to work early every morning because **"when the sun grew hot, it would melt."** From this we can infer that if a person did not work for his food, he did not eat bread that day!

Preparation for the Sabbath

Exodus 16:22 **Now it came about on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses,** ²³ **then he said to them, "This is what the LORD meant: Tomorrow is a sabbath observance, a holy sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning."** ²⁴ **So they put it aside until morning, as Moses had ordered, and it did not become foul, nor was there any worm in it.** ²⁵ **And Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field.** ²⁶ **"Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, *the* sabbath, there will be none."** ²⁷ **And it came about on the seventh day that some of the people went out to gather, but they found none.**

Preparation for the Sabbath, the day of rest, was different from all the other days of the week. Early on Friday morning, the Israelites were to gather **"twice as much bread, two omers for each one"** because of the Sabbath. The bread would not be foul by morning and would be good all-day Saturday, but not until Sunday morning.

The dew did not come on the Sabbath and neither did the manna as the Scripture says, **“And it came about on the seventh day that some of the people went out to gather, but they found none.”** Being disobedient, they did not have bread to eat on the Sabbath.

The Disobedience

Exodus 16:28 **Then the LORD said to Moses, " How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My instructions? ²⁹ "See, the LORD has given you the sabbath; therefore He gives you bread for two days on the sixth day. Remain every man in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day." ³⁰ So the people rested on the seventh day.**

"See, the LORD has given you the sabbath; therefore, He gives you bread for two days on the sixth day. Remain every man in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day." Here is the first passage in which we find the instruction that directs the Israelites not to work on the Sabbath. The LORD rested on the Sabbath from His labors at the end of the week of creation. We do not know if the patriarchs of the past had actually observed the Sabbath days' rest. However, there is little doubt that during the exodus, they traveled on the Sabbath which was the second day out of Egypt. Nevertheless, here is the instruction. In the wilderness they were not to **“go out of his place on the seventh day.”**

The Name Manna

Exodus 16:31 **And the house of Israel named it manna, and it was like coriander seed, white; and its taste was like wafers with honey.**

As stated before, Israel named the flake-like seed **“manna”** which means in the ancient Hebrew language, “What is it?” But in this passage, we find our first description of the seed, **“it was like coriander seed, white; and its taste was like wafers with honey.”**

Interestingly, coriander is also known as cilantro or Chinese parsley. Once dried, the small fruit they produce is called coriander seeds. The seeds in picture 31 are coriander; however, manna was “like” the coriander seed

but it was not that seed. It was white and tasted **“like wafers with honey.”** We know nothing about these “wafers” that will allow for a modern-day application except that they were made into thin cakes. Even to that point, we do not know how thin the cakes were. We do know about honey. The taste of honey is determined by the local flowers from which the sap is taken by the bees. An expert can tell the flower used by the bees and in many cases even the region where that flower was grown by the taste of the honey. Therefore, the honey taste of the manna must have reminded them of the honey produced by bees in the land of Goshen.



Picture 31: Coriander Seeds

The Omerful

Exodus 16:32 Then Moses said, "This is what the LORD has commanded, 'Let an omerful of it be kept throughout your generations, that they may see the bread that I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.'" ³³ And Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar and put an omerful of manna in it, and place it before the LORD, to be kept throughout your generations." ³⁴ As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the Testimony, to be kept. ³⁵ And the sons of Israel ate the manna forty years, until they came to an inhabited land; they ate the manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan. ³⁶ (Now an omer is a tenth of an ephah.)

“Take a jar and put an omerful of manna in it, and place it before the LORD, to be kept throughout your generations ... so Aaron placed it before the Testimony, to be kept.” Here we have the first clue in the timing of the actual engraving of the book of Exodus. When the text speaks of the “Testimony” it is referring to the two tablets which we call the Ten Commandment. Those tablets were stored in the Ark of the Testimony which we call the Ark of the Covenant. It is not obvious here but the words testimony and covenant mean the same thing. The Ten Commandments are the Testimony or Covenant of the LORD. Less obvious in studying this book is that the Ten Commandments had not been given yet and the Ark of the Testimony had not been built. Furthermore, this passage states that **“the sons of Israel ate the manna forty years, until they came to an inhabited land,”** an indication that the book of Exodus was not fully finished until the forty years spent in the wilderness came to their conclusion. It is safe to conclude that the command to keep an omerful of manna in the Ark could have been executed at any time during the forty years while the manna was still being given. On that note, the manna was surely gathered and placed in the Ark when it was completed before the end of two years. In this passage, Moses must have been summarizing the ultimate conclusion of the topic of manna for all time as he did on other topics in the books of Genesis and Exodus.