

EATING ANGELS' FOOD

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Then said the LORD unto Moses. Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gether a certain rate every day (Exod. 16:4).

And the children of Israel did eat manna forty years ... until they came unto the borders of the land of Canaan (Exod. 16:35).

Yea, they spake against God: they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?... And [God] had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven. Man did eat angels' food (Ps. 78:19. 24-25).

The people asked, and he brought quails, and satisfied them with the bread of heaven (Ps. 105:40).

The account of how God sustained the children of Israel during their journey from Egypt to Canaan has always commanded attention. Prophets referred to it. the psalmist wrote about it. the Savior used it as an illustration, the apostles preached about it, and today foolish critics argue about it. There are three postures taken by people who speak about this incident in the wilderness.

1. Denial

Unbelievers state the story is based on fantasy: it never happened. They say the same about all the supernatural miracles mentioned in the Bible. Unless they can explain things according to natural laws, the incidents are dismissed as untrue.

2. Dilution

Some people believe the miracle was unnecessary, for the people gathered a substance produced by the tamarix manifera trees that grow profusely in that part of the world. For example, Werner Keller, the German journalist who explored the Middle East, wrote a book entitled The Bible as History and discussed the manna that fell in the wilderness. He says: 'In every valley throughout the whole region of Mt. Sinai, there can still be found The Bread of Heaven,' which the monks and Arabs gather to preserve and sell to strangers who pass that way." These words were written in 1483 by

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Breitenbach, Dean of Mainz, in an account of his pilgrimage to Sinai. "The same bread," he continues, "falls about daybreak like dew or frost and hangs in beads on grass, stones and twigs. It is sweet like honey. and sticks to the teeth. We bought a lot of it." Keller then lists a number of expeditions whose findings were supportive of this description. One of the explorers named Bodenheimer said: 'The taste of these crystallized grains of manna is peculiarly sweet. It is most of all like honey when it has been left a long time to solidify.' "It was like coriander seed. white: and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey" (see Exod. 16:31). The tamarix tree that produces this manna can still be found in that part of the Middle East. The Bedouins knead the globules into a puree which they consume as a welcome and nourishing addition to their often monotonous diet. The tamarix trees grow in profusion in Sinai and along the Wadi of Arabah right up to the Dead Sea.'

3. Defense

This German author was a sincere Christian who wished to

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vindicate the accuracy of the Scriptures. His opinion, however, may not represent the truth expressed in the Bible. Arthur W. Pink, the noted author and expositor, also researched this subject, and his comments are interesting. He wrote: "It is striking to note how the supernatural is evidenced in connection with the giving of the manna. In Exodus 16:16 we read, 'This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded, gather of it every man according to his eating, an omer for every man, according to the number of your persons; take ye every man for them which are in his tents.' Now, a conservative estimate of the total number of Israelites who came out of Egypt would be two million, for they had more than six hundred thousand men able to go forth to war (see Num. 1:45-46). An 'omer' was to be gathered for every one of these two million souls, and an omer is the equivalent of six pints. There would be twelve million pints, or nine million pounds gathered daily, which was four thousand five hundred tons. Hence, ten trains, each having thirty cars, and each car having in it fifteen tons, would be needed for a single day's supply. Over a million tons of manna were gathered annually by Israel. And let it be remembered this continued for forty years! Equally wonderful, equally miraculous, equally Divine is the Bible."² This viewpoint is correct, for without divine assistance the nation would have perished in that inhospitable region. If God intended to bring the Hebrews into the land of Canaan, it was incumbent upon Him to sustain them until that became possible.

The Manna Was Divinely Provided... Perfectly Amazing
Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold. I will rain bread
from heaven for you (Exod. 16:4).

And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: And the children of Israel said unto them. Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt where we sat by the flesh pots, and where we did eat bread to the full: for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness to kill the whole assembly with hunger (Exod. 16:2-3).

Moses and Aaron must have been very frustrated. The stay at Elim, where twelve wells of water had quenched the thirst of the people, had been followed by increasing problems. The wells could not continue to meet the demands of such a large multitude, and the limited shade offered by seventy palm trees could not shield everybody from the relentless heat of the sun. Everybody was complaining and the camp was in an uproar. Animals were listless, children were crying, and parents were becoming increasingly resentful. Then came the voice of God to reassure Moses. The Lord said, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you." What followed almost beggared description.

Throughout the night, the bread fell like a gigantic snowstorm until the strange substance covered the entire camp. When the sun arose, its light shone upon a scene of resplendent beauty. The first men to see the spectacle wondered if they were dreaming, for such a spectacle had never been seen. Suspiciously, they tasted "the bread of heaven," which seemed like wafers made with honey. The fact that enormous quantities had fallen from the sky was temporarily forgotten, as the excited Israelites enjoyed an early morning picnic. Somewhere in the crowd Moses stood and whispered: "Thank you, Lord."

They said therefore unto him, What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work? Our

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fathers did eat manna in the desert: as it is written. He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Then Jesus said unto them. Verily, verily. I say unto you. Moses gave you not that bread from heaven: but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him. Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them. I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger: and he that believeth on me shall never thirst (John 6:30-35).

A crowd of people stared at the Savior. They had witnessed an astonishing miracle, but doubt was paralyzing their faith. "They said therefore unto him, What sign shewest thou then. that we may see. and believe thee? What dost thou work?" (John 6:30). It was evident that God alone could supply the Bread of Life - no other source was available. When Jesus claimed to be The True Bread, He implied the manna was a foreshadowing of a greater event still to come.

Deliberately Possessed . . . Personally Accepted
This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded. Gather of it every man, according to his eating, an omer for every man. according to the number of your persons: take ye every man for them which are in his tents (Exod. 16:16).

The nights in the wilderness were extremely exciting. As the darkness approached, even the children waited for their first glimpse of the falling manna. It descended with the grace of snowflakes. Perhaps the people were afraid to go outside their tents, but when the dawn came it seemed as if angels had covered the ground with a huge white blanket. As the manna reflected the magnificence of the rising sun, the people beheld a scene of loveliness never before witnessed. Nevertheless, the tact remained that families could have starved to death. The manna was useless unless it was gathered. Moses was very explicit when he instructed the heads of households to collect what was necessary for their families. It would appear to be inconceivable that men would neglect or refuse to do what was urgently essential. The same truth applied to the gathering of the quail that were brought by strong winds to the area. If people refused to obey the instructions given, death was inevitable. The Hebrews chose between sustenance and starvation. If they obeyed God, they lived: otherwise, they perished.

Many years later the Savior expounded that Scripture and emphasized that the manna in the wilderness did not supply eternal life: the people who ate it eventually died. He alone was the true Bread of Life, able to supply immortality.

Verily, verily. I say unto you, He that believeth on me bath everlasting life. I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the livine bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world (John 6:47-51).

It is interesting that, although the heads of households were commanded to gather manna for their dependents, each individual was required to partake for himself, the father could only gather food for his family - they had to eat it! The Lord said: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37).

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Delightfully Pleasing... Possibly Angelic
Though he had commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven and had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven. Man did eat angels' food (Ps. 78:23-25).

And the manna was as coriander seed, and the colour thereof as the colour of bdellium. And the people went about, and gathered it, and ground it in mills, or beat it in a mortar, and baked it in pans, and made cakes of it: and the taste of it was as the taste of fresh oil (Num. 11:7-8).

Abber, the Hebrew word which has been translated angels, means strong or mighty and is used regarding princes (Ps. 68:31) and nobles (Job 24:22). It could be rendered "food of nobles and princes." that is, food of richer quality than is found on the

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tables of peasants. The immediate context would seem to require the translation used in the Authorized Version, for the food is said to have come down from heaven. It is rendered "food of angels" in the Septuagint. the Vulgate. other ancient versions of the Bible, and by Luther."

The psalmist was convinced the manna was food upon which heavenly beings feasted. If that viewpoint was correct, then angels had been thrilled, sustained, and nourished by their fellowship with the Son of God. The text might therefore provide an insight into the diet of angelic beings.

It is worthy of consideration that the manna was taken by the Hebrew women and ground in mills, beaten in mortars. baked in pans, and made into cakes and other delicacies. Their efforts were phenomenal, for what they produced resembled the taste of fresh oil. All Christians should consider this fact. God sent the Bread of Life, but much depends upon how it is appropriated. The Savior is able to help His followers in every circumstance of life. People who never "explore" fellowship with Christ may say as did the mixed multitude in Israel: "But now our soul is dried away" (Num. 11:6).

Many years ago. I heard an old man giving a testimony. He said: "Brothers and Sisters, I love Sunday when I can come to church and get my batteries charged by listening attentively to the sermons. Then on Monday and Tuesday I feed on them, but by Wednesday I have forgotten what I heard. During Thursday. Friday. and Saturday, I wait for Sunday so I can recharge my batteries." I wondered what might have happened if the preacher had an off day! God gave us oxygen to breathe even moment of every day. He also supplies "angels' food" to produce similar results.

Definitely Prolonged ... Purpose Accomplished

And the children of Israel did eat manna forty years, until they came to a land inhabited: they did eat manna, until they came unto the borders of the land of Canaan (Exod. 16:35).

Evidently. God was able to complete what He commenced. The continuance of His blessing did not depend upon the worthiness of Israel, but upon His own faithfulness. There were many occasions when the Hebrews displeased the Lord, when their desire to return to Egypt was offensive. Yet, in spite of their complaints, the manna continued to descend.

And the mixed multitude that was among them fell lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall

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give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely: the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick. But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes (Num. 11:4-6).

We should not quickly condemn the children of Israel. for unfortunately, we resemble them; we are selfish and like to control our destiny. When prayers are not answered favorably, we are displeased and begin to question God's wisdom. The "food of Egypt" was associated with bondage. The patience of God is almost beyond comprehension. Throughout the forty years in which Israel wandered in the wilderness, the Lord's mercy never diminished. The manna continued to fall until the land of milk and honey was just across the river. Thomas O. Chisholm might have been reviewing Israel's journey when he wrote:

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;
As Thou hast been, Thou forever wilt be.
Great is Thy faithfulness!
Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning, new mercies I see:
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided;
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!

1. Werner Keller, *The Bible as History* (New York; William Morrow and Company, 1956), 117-120.
2. Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in Exodus* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), 124-25.
3. Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the Psalms*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 298.

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