

CAN HE PROVIDE BREAD?

16 Then they set out from Elim and the whole congregation of the children of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, located between Elim and Sinai. They arrived there on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from Egypt. ²The whole congregation of the children of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³The children of Israel said to them, "We wish that we had died by Jehovah's hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat around the pots of meat, when we ate bread and were full. You have brought us into this wilderness in order to kill this whole assembly with hunger!" ⁴Then Jehovah said to Moses, "Look; I will rain bread down from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, so that I may test them, to know whether or not they will walk in accordance with my law. ⁵And it shall be that on the sixth day, when they prepare what they have gathered, it shall be twice as much as they gather daily." ⁶So Moses and Aaron said to the children of Israel, "In the evening you shall know that Jehovah has brought you out of the land of Egypt; ⁷and in the morning you shall see the glory of Jehovah, for he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you grumble against us?" ⁸And Moses said, "You will know that it is Jehovah when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning; for Jehovah has heard your grumbling that is actually grumbling against him. Who are we? Your grumbling is not against us, but against Jehovah!" ⁹Then Moses said to Aaron, "Tell the whole congregation of Israel, Come near before the presence of Jehovah, because he has heard your grumbling." ¹⁰As Aaron addressed the whole congregation of the children of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness and saw the glory of Jehovah appear in the cloud. ¹¹And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, ¹²"I have heard the grumbling of the children of Israel. Tell them, In the evening you shall eat meat and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; and you shall know that I am Jehovah your God."

¹³That evening quail came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew all around the camp. ¹⁴When the dew was gone, there lay on the surface of the wilderness thin flakes, like frost on the ground. ¹⁵When the children of Israel saw it, they asked one another, "What is it?" for they did not know what it was. Then Moses told them, "It is the bread that Jehovah has given you to eat. ¹⁶This is what Jehovah has commanded: Every man is to gather of it as much as he needs. Take an omer's worth for each person in your household; every man is to gather an omer's worth for each one living in his tent." ¹⁷The children of Israel did so, some gathered much and some gathered little. ¹⁸When they measured it with an omer, they found that he who had gathered much had no excess and he who had gathered little had no lack—every man had gathered as much as he needed. ¹⁹Moses said to them, "Let no one leave any of it until the morning." ²⁰But they did not listen to Moses, some left a portion of it until the morning, but it was full of maggots and became rotten. And Moses was angry with them. ²¹They gathered it each morning, everyone gathered as much as he needed, and when the sun became hot, it melted away.

²²On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread—two omer's worth for each person—and the leaders of the congregation came and reported this to Moses. ²³He said to them, "This is what Jehovah has said: Tomorrow is a solemn rest, a holy Sabbath, dedicated to Jehovah. So bake what you wish to bake and boil what you wish

to boil. Save whatever is left over and keep it until the morning.”²⁴ So they saved it until the morning, as Moses instructed them to do; it did not rot, nor were there any maggots in it.²⁵ Moses said, “Eat it today; because today is a Sabbath dedicated to Jehovah. Today you will not find any of it on the ground.”²⁶ Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none.”²⁷ Nevertheless, on the seventh day some of the people went out to gather it, but they found none.²⁸ Then Jehovah said to Moses, “How long do you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?²⁹ Look; because Jehovah has given you the Sabbath, therefore on the sixth day he has given you enough bread for two days. Every man is to remain in his dwelling, let no one go out from his dwelling on the seventh day.”³⁰ So the people rested on the seventh day.³¹ Now the people of Israel called it Manna; it was like white coriander seed and it tasted like wafers made with honey.

³² Moses said, “This is what Jehovah has commanded: Let an omer’s worth of it be kept throughout your generations, so that you may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.”³³ So Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar and put an omer’s worth of manna into it; then put it in the presence of Jehovah to be kept throughout your generations.”³⁴ As Jehovah commanded Moses, Aaron laid it before the Testimony, to be preserved.³⁵ The children of Israel ate the manna for forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate the manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.³⁶ (An omer is one tenth of an ephah.) (Ex. 16:1-36)

Introduction

Ruth was at the end of her endurance. She was so hungry that going to sleep was a nightmare. She would dream of chocolate bars. Sometimes she would reach for them, but they were always just beyond her grasp. She was tired. She was tired of abuse and tired of hunger. Just too tired to go on.

It was 1933, the middle of the Great Depression. She had four young boys and a baby girl. Her husband, Harry, had a job, but his entire paycheck went to quench his thirst for alcohol.

Ruth was planning to commit suicide: she would lock herself into the kitchen, turn on the burners of the gas stove, lie down on the floor, and wait for death to take her. Ruth took her baby daughter to the bedroom and laid her in her crib; then she dragged herself back to the kitchen.

There on the kitchen table lay one of the magazines her eldest son had brought home from a neighbor. The title of one of the articles caught Ruth’s eye, it contained the word “believing” and it quoted a Bible verse from the gospel: *“Therefore I say to you, ‘Whatever things you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received them, and you shall have them.’”* (Mk. 11:24.) The article intrigued Ruth. She sat down and read it. The article seemed to be saying that you can trust God to supply your needs; all you need to do is ask Him. Ruth was skeptical. It seemed impossible that all she had

to do was pray, "Lord, my children are hungry, will You please feed them?" and then act as if He would.

Skeptical though she was, Ruth nevertheless figured, "What have I got to lose?" She prayed, "God, will You please send some food for the children's supper? Thank You." Then she set the table for supper. Suddenly she felt sick. Was she building false hopes for something she had no assurance would be provided? Was it foolish and would she be disappointed in trusting God to meet her needs? Could He and would He provide bread?

Ruth's doubts were dispelled and her questions were answered by a knock at the front door. It was the old man who just recently moved into the shack across the street. He explained that he had just come from his daughter's house, and her husband, who ran a butcher shop, had given him some extra pieces of meat. The old man now offered Ruth a bundle of meaty beef bones, a beef heart, and a package of fresh liver.

Although their little garden looked bare, when Ruth sent one of the children to inspect it, he came back with a few onions. Then there was a knock at the back door. Ruth's nephew arrived with a batch of biscuits his mother sent over, she also included some cinnamon buns.

This is Ruth's testimony:

I thank God that He heard my prayer uttered from the depths of despair that August afternoon. Never again did I feel completely alone. Now at age 80, I can honestly say that God has not failed me once. Jesus has walked with me throughout the years since the day that I dared to believe. (*POWER*, 8/15/82, pp.2-ff.)

In moments of unbelief we, like Old Testament Israel, complain against the LORD and doubt His fatherly concern. But let us learn a lesson from Ruth's experience, and from the experience of Old Testament Israel: Because the LORD is our God, we can trust Him to meet our needs.

I. Because the LORD is Your God, Never Regret Your "Exodus"

When the children of Israel departed from Elim, (the place of palm trees and springs of water,) the LORD led them into the wilderness of Sin. The wilderness of Sin is a barren, desolate place. As the people use up the last of their supplies, they anticipate death by starvation out there in that desolate wilderness.

Confronted with this problem, look at their reaction. First, they murmur against Moses, the man who is the representative of the LORD (vs. 2.) We may well ask ourselves, "How many times do I murmur against God because He does not fulfill my expectations? ... because He does not 'live up to the caricature I have

envisioned of what He should be and what He should do?" Second, the Israelites idealize their past; they long for "the good old days" when they were slaves in Egypt (vs. 3.) But they have a selective memory: they exaggerate whatever benefits they may have had—did they really sit around pots of meat and eat all the food they wanted, as they claim in verse 3? Also, they neglect to remember their bondage and oppression. By way of example, we may be tempted at times to protest, "Before I came to Christ I fit in with the crowd, now I feel like an outsider. At that time I didn't worry about how I lived, now I struggle with my lifestyle, trying to resist temptation and lead a godly life. Back then God left me alone, now He is always stretching me and changing me! I miss those 'good old days.'" –but were they really "good old days?" Third, they completely lose sight of God's promises, as recorded in Exodus 3:8, *"I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey."* They conclude that if redemption means starving to death in a barren wilderness, they would rather be damned than be saved: *"We wish that we had died by Jehovah's hand in the land of Egypt"* (vs.3;) i.e.; they say they wish they had met the same fate as the Egyptians!

Because of where God had led them, because of what He had brought into their lives, these people came to regret their Exodus. But thanks be to God that in His covenant faithfulness He did not give them their desire. On the contrary, He miraculously provided for them and sustained them until the day He brought His people into the Promised Land of Canaan, note Exodus 16:35, *"The children of Israel ate the manna for forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate the manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan."*

Because the LORD is your God, never regret your "Exodus" from sin and from the bondage of the devil. Do not lose sight of the future to which God calls you as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ: *"I know the plans I have for you,' declares Jehovah, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'"* (Jer. 29:11.) Do not lose sight of God's good purpose with regard to all things that He sees fit to bring into your life:

... we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, those who have been called according to his purpose;²⁹for those whom God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.
(Rom. 8:28-30)

Do not lose sight of God's fatherly love and commitment to you expressed by His acts of discipline:

You have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶because the Lord disciplines those he loves...¹¹No discipline seems

pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Heb. 12:5-6a, 11)

II. Because the LORD is Your God, Expect Him to Provide Your “Daily Bread”

It is the LORD who has led the people of Israel into this barren wilderness of Sin, they are His people, and He assumes the responsibility for their care. The LORD now reveals to Moses: *“I will rain bread down from heaven for you”* (v. 4.) The LORD will open up the storehouses of heaven and from His own unlimited resources will provide for the need of His people. Note how the Apostle Paul encourages the Philippian Christians with the assurance of the heavenly Father’s faithful care for His children in Christ: *“My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus”* (Phil. 4:19.)

But the LORD provides this divine manna in such a way as to teach His people to trust Him for their “daily bread.” While encamped in the wilderness of Sin, the people are instructed to gather a day’s portion every day (vs 4.) When they seek to store some up for use the next day, contrary to Moses’ instruction, they find that it has bred worms and spoiled (vs. 19-20.) This should bring to mind the instructions our Lord Jesus gives concerning the way in which we are to pray: *“Give us this day our daily bread”* (Matt. 6:11.) The answer as to why the LORD so instructs us to pray is to be found in such a passage as Proverbs 30:8-9, *“give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with the food that is my necessary portion. ⁹Otherwise, if I have too much, I may disown you and say, ‘Who is Jehovah?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and by doing so dishonor the name of my God.”* We should also take note of Deuteronomy 8:11-14,

Be careful that you do not forget Jehovah your God, failing to observe his commandments, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. ¹²Be careful for fear that, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, ¹³and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, ¹⁴then your heart becomes proud and you forget Jehovah your God. (Deut. 8:11-14)

There seems to be the general spiritual principle that God’s people cannot handle the fullness of the LORD’s blessing in this present life, and it is by His grace that He does not give that blessing in full measure at this present time.

Because the LORD is your God, expect Him to provide your “daily bread.” Consider the counsel of the Psalmist: *“Fear Jehovah, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing. ¹⁰The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek Jehovah lack no good thing”* (Psl. 34:9-10.)

III. Because the LORD is Your God, Be Confident of His Divine Resources

Israel's murmuring is a slander against the LORD, against His goodness, His faithfulness, His ability, and His very character; therefore, the LORD takes personal offense at Israel's sinful reaction to their present plight. To vindicate His great Name, the LORD causes His glory to appear in the cloud (vs.10) and promises to supply His people not only with bread, but also with an abundance of meat. He instructs Moses to inform the people: *"At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God"* (vs. 11.) Note: In the spring, quail fly northward in immense flocks from the interior of Africa. The LORD providentially caused such a flight of quail to fall into the camp of the Israelites, providing them with a miraculous abundance of meat (Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentaries on the Old Testament, The Pentateuch*, Vol.2, p.67.)

Besides the one time gift of quail, the LORD supplied a daily portion of manna, which He continued to faithfully provide throughout the 40 years of Israel's wilderness journey. This divine manna may not have been supplied for the people every single day for 40 years; but only on those occasions when no other provisions were available to them (Keil and Delitzsch, pp.70-71.) On many occasions their flocks and herds could have provided them with dairy and meat products, as Exodus 12:38 indicates, *"Many other people went up with them (out of Egypt), as well as large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds."* Also, there were various areas of the wilderness where the people could engage in a limited form of agriculture.

Though He may have supplied the manna every single day, it appears that the LORD did so only in those places and at those times when there were no other natural resources available; thereby demonstrating to His people that they could always rely upon the LORD to supply their needs from His divine resources. Consider the way the Lord Jesus refers to this gracious provision in His encounter with the devil:

*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.
2After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."
4Jesus answered, "It is written: Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Matt.4:1-4)*

The setting is one in which the Lord Jesus had a genuine human need; He was starving in the wilderness. Coming to the Lord in His time of human need, the devil suggests that Jesus should take it upon Himself to meet His need, rather than looking to God. After all, God is the One who brought Him into this wilderness (*"Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,"* Matt. 4:1.) The tempter's suggestion is that Jesus should take matters into His own hands, even if it means disobeying God's commandments. How does Jesus reply? He

declares, *"It is written: Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."*—Jesus is quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, a passage that alludes to the LORD's miraculous provision of manna in the wilderness. Jesus is remembering and trusting in the fact that His heavenly Father did not abandon His people; on the contrary, He met their need in a totally unexpected way from His unlimited and divine resources. In distinction to Old Testament Israel, who doubted the LORD's goodness and ability, the Lord Jesus placed His trust and confidence in His heavenly Father to meet His legitimate need.

Because the LORD is your God, be confident of His divine resources. Note again, Philippians 4:19, *"My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."*

Conclusion

In times of unbelief we, like Old Testament Israel, tend to complain against the LORD and question His fatherly concern. In a spirit of unbelief we, like Israel, skeptically ask the question, *"Can he provide bread?"* (Psl. 78:20.)

Ruth Wirgo can give us the answer to that question; from her own personal experience she knows the answer to be "Yes!" As she testifies, "Now, at age 80, I can honestly say that God has not failed me once. Jesus has walked with me throughout the years, since the day that I dared to believe."

Let us learn a lesson from Ruth, the very lesson with which we are confronted in this passage of Scripture: Because the LORD is our God, we can trust Him to meet our every need.