

## Exodus, Part 9

With God's miracle at the Yom Sup crossing, the Israelites were rescued from certain death or capture by Pharaoh's pursuing army. They were trapped by the surrounding mountains with their backs to Yom Sup and Pharaoh's army blocking their only means of escape. But God provided a way of escape by the parting of Yom Sup allowing the Israelites to cross on dry land to the other side. Once they had safely crossed Pharaoh's army attempted to pursue them only to be drowned as God closed the opening in the sea and brought the waters down on top of them.

With Pharaoh's decisive defeat, the Israelites turned to singing. Safe from the pursuing army of Pharaoh, they pause to give thanks with a song of praise.

**Exodus 15:1** Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord, saying,

“I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;  
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.

<sup>2</sup> The Lord is my strength and my song,  
and he has become my salvation;  
this is my God, and I will praise him,  
my father's God, and I will exalt him.

<sup>3</sup> The Lord is a man of war;  
the Lord is his name.

<sup>4</sup> “Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea,  
and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea.

<sup>5</sup> The floods covered them;  
they went down into the depths like a stone.

<sup>6</sup> Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power,  
your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy.

In the first section, the theme is immediately stated—the destruction of the Egyptian army in the sea. Moses acknowledged the great strength and power of the only true God in bringing about such an awesome deliverance (salvation). For that reason, Moses said God caused him to rejoice (He is ... my song).

**Exodus 15:7** In the greatness of your majesty you overthrow your adversaries;

you send out your fury; it consumes them like stubble.

<sup>8</sup> At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up;  
the floods stood up in a heap;  
the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea.

<sup>9</sup> The enemy said, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake,  
I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them.  
I will draw my sword; my hand shall destroy them.’

<sup>10</sup> You blew with your wind; the sea covered them;  
they sank like lead in the mighty waters.

<sup>11</sup> “Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods?  
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,  
awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?”

This second section details the crushing of the Egyptians by God. These verses stress the mighty power of God (the greatness of Your Majesty, v. 7) in controlling the elements and using them to destroy His adversaries.

“The blast of Your nostrils” (v. 8) refers to the wind that parted the sea, and the words “You blew with Your wind” (v. 10) refer to the wind that collapsed the billowed water; these are poetic anthropomorphisms.

The Egyptians, confident of victory, arrogantly charged against Israel, but in the minutest expense of divine energy God utterly destroyed them.

Recognition of God’s mighty works led Moses to praise the Lord’s uniqueness: “Who is like You?” (v. 11) No one is like Him in holiness and glory.

**Exodus 15:12** You stretched out your right hand;  
the earth swallowed them.

<sup>13</sup> “You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed;  
you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode.

<sup>14</sup> The peoples have heard; they tremble;  
pangs have seized the inhabitants of Philistia.

<sup>15</sup> Now are the chiefs of Edom dismayed;  
trembling seizes the leaders of Moab;  
all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away.

<sup>16</sup> Terror and dread fall upon them;  
because of the greatness of your arm, they are still as a stone,  
till your people, O Lord, pass by,  
till the people pass by whom you have purchased.

<sup>17</sup> You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain,  
the place, O Lord, which you have made for your abode,  
the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established.

<sup>18</sup> The Lord will reign forever and ever.”

Then Moses described the consequences of Israel’s deliverance by such a great God. As a result of this marvelous triumph by His right hand, God in His unfailing love (*hesed*, “loyal love”) would then lead His own into His holy dwelling in the Promised Land.

Another result was that other nations would fear Israel, especially those lands Israel was about to enter. The greatness of Egypt had been wiped out, her land ravished, her people left in mourning, and her army destroyed. Other nations, hearing of the power of the Israelites’ God, would cower in fear.

People of Philistia mentioned first, would have been some of the first ones to have heard of the Yom Sup crossing. Edom was located south and east of the Dead Sea, and Moab was immediately north of Edom. According to Joshua’s account of the Conquest, the Canaanites had a predisposed fear of the Israelites.

Moses’ triumphal song includes the assurance (Ex. 15:17) that God would bring His people into the Promised Land and to Jerusalem, God’s own mountain, where His presence would be evident in the sanctuary. Moses also affirmed that the Lord will reign over His people forever. God is to be praised for what He did in effecting a mighty deliverance, for what He was then doing in preparing the land for conquest, and for what He will do in His eternal reign.

**Exodus 15:19** For when the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his horsemen went into the sea, the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them, but the people of Israel walked on dry ground in the midst of the sea. <sup>20</sup> Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing. <sup>21</sup> And Miriam sang to them:  
“Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;  
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.”

Though at first glance, verse 19 may seem misplaced in the narrative, it purposefully repeats the reason for such joyful praise—the defeat of the Egyptian army in the sea and the deliverance of the Israelites.

Miriam is the first woman in the Bible to be called a prophetess. Micah suggested that she, along with Moses and Aaron, had a significant leadership role in Israel’s wilderness wanderings.

**Micah 6:4** For I brought you up from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

Since Moses was 80 years old and Aaron was 83 at the time of the Exodus (Ex. 7:7), Miriam was probably in her 90s because she was a young girl when Moses was born (2:4, 7–9). She and the women with her danced with tambourines as she sang a joyful reply to Moses’ song of God’s triumph over the Egyptians.

## **On to Mt. Sinai**

Having been miraculously redeemed from bondage, God’s people were full of praise. But now they faced the wilderness. Would the joy of deliverance and the knowledge of their God give them the inner strength to face the trials that lay before them? This section of the book describes the travels of the people from the Yom Sup to Mount Sinai. The rest of the book (chaps. 19–40) describes God’s dealings with the people during the encampment there.

**Exodus 15:22** Then Moses made Israel set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. <sup>23</sup> When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah. <sup>24</sup> And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" <sup>25</sup> And he cried to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the Lord made for them a statute and a rule, and there he tested them, <sup>26</sup> saying, "If you will diligently listen to the voice of the Lord your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, your healer."

The Israelites entered the Desert of Shur also called the Desert of Etham (Num. 33:8). The Israelites went three days without water until they came to Marah. The exact location of Marah is uncertain, as are the positions of Etham, Shur, and Elim. The identification of these locations heavily depends on the location of Mt. Sinai. Some place Mt. Sinai somewhere around the southern end of the Sinai Peninsula and others see it as on the eastern side of the Gulf of Aqaba.

The Israelites could not drink the water at Marah because it was bitter. So they complained against Moses. This response is amazing in light of their recent deliverance and triumphal songs of worship. They had seen miracle after miracle from God, especially the Yom Sup crossing, yet they quickly sank into a lack of faith in God to see them through this latest test, and they complained bitterly to Moses.

Despite their lack of faith and the undrinkable water that greatly discouraged the people, God responded mercifully to Moses' prayer and made the water drinkable. The word translated here as a "log" is elsewhere translated as anything from a tree to a stick. The wood that Moses tossed into the water did not have a magical effect on the water; it was simply a symbolic act in anticipation of God's working a miracle (like Moses lifting his staff over the sea, 14:16). It was probably intended to be a symbolic action designed to convey to the grumbling crowds that something had been done about the water. The sweetening of the water with a branch was another of God's miracles for keeping His people safe. The wood rendering

the water sweet should be seen as a picture of the Cross redeeming the lost before God.

God not only gave his people sweet water at Marah, but he also gave them something much sweeter – a promise. Then the Lord gave the people a simple principle: obedience brings blessing, and disobedience brings judgment. Obedience to the voice of God would guarantee them good health. None of the diseases with which God had smitten Egypt would come upon Israel. Yahweh is a healer, and he would rather heal than inflict disease as he did in Egypt. This principle is restated in more detail in Deuteronomy 28.

**Exodus 15:27** Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they encamped there by the water.

From Marah the people went to Elim where there was abundant water and shade. There were 12 springs and 70 palm trees at Elim. Exactly how long the people camped there is not stated.

### **Food Becomes an Issue**

**Exodus 16:1** They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. <sup>2</sup> And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, <sup>3</sup> and the people of Israel said to them, “Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

<sup>4</sup> 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 every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not.

<sup>5</sup> On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.” <sup>6</sup> So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, “At evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, <sup>7</sup> and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against the

Lord. For what are we, that you grumble against us?”<sup>8</sup> And Moses said, “When the Lord gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the Lord has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the Lord.”

<sup>9</sup> Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, ‘Come near before the Lord, for he has heard your grumbling.’ ”<sup>10</sup> And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. <sup>11</sup> And the Lord said to Moses, <sup>12</sup> “I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.’ ”

From Elim, the Israelite host began to move eastward toward the Desert of Sin, named after the moon god Sin. What little food they had brought from Egypt was now exhausted and the group was too large to live off the land. For the third time within the month, the congregation began to grumble against Moses and Aaron. Their hunger caused them to idealize their sojourn in Egypt. They remembered having all the food they wanted. Now it appeared that they would starve to death, not in a glorious Promised Land, but in “this wilderness”. The lack of bread caused the people to forget their horrible plight in Egypt, to think only of the food they had in Egypt, and to “grumble” against their leader.

As with the people’s complaint for water at Marah, the Lord immediately responded by giving them bread from heaven which they called “manna”. The manna came early in the morning, actually during the night according to Numbers 11:9, and melted in the heat of the day (Ex. 16:21). Each day the people were to gather only enough for that day. This meant they would have to trust the Lord to bring the food each morning! On the sixth day, they were to gather enough for that day and the next, since the manna would not come on the seventh day.

Two theories have been advanced to try to explain the manna rationally. Some writers have suggested that the manna was a sweet-tasting excretion left by insects on the twigs of tamarisk trees in June and July. These drops range from the size of a pinhead to that of a pea. During

the night it hardens. The sun causes this substance to drop from trees. Ants carried off the grains in the morning when the ground temperature reached seventy degrees. The secretion/droppings are gathered by natives of the region during June and July. However, manna was provided year-round, on the ground, and the tamarisk excretion did not spoil within 24 hours.

The second theory advanced by the rationalists traces the manna to a certain lichen that grows on rocks in the region.

Many explicit statements within the account must be ignored to embrace either of these theories about the manna. The quantity of manna needed constantly through forty years and the fact that no manna appeared on the seventh day are but two of the problems that confront the rationalist as he attempts to rid the account of the miraculous element. The Lord said He would rain down bread from heaven. The language clearly eliminates naturalistic explanations.

One should not conclude that the Israelites had *nothing* to eat except manna during the wandering period. Some foods would have been provided by the desert. They had with them flocks that produced meat and milk. Deuteronomy 2:6 records an attempt to buy food from the Edomites. No doubt other tribes of the region were similarly approached.

Moses and Aaron rebuked the people for their grumbling against them and the Lord and reassured them of His provision for their needs, which should cause the community to know that He is the Lord their God.

**Exodus 16:13** In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp.

That evening the quail came and covered the camp. These were not flying fish or locusts as some have supposed, but feathered fowl as Psalm 78:27 makes clear – “he rained meat on them like dust, winged birds like the sand of the seas.”

Twice during the wilderness wandering God provided these fowl in abundance for his people. Large flocks of quail migrate north from Africa



and Arabia in the spring, and back south in the fall. The miracle here is in bringing these birds from their normal migratory route to the camp of Israel. Quail fly only a few feet above the ground which makes them relatively easy to catch. Egyptian art depicts people catching the birds in hand nets.

And the very next morning the Israelites discovered a dew laying about the camp. The word translated “dew” refers to a “night mist”. Numbers 11:9 suggests this dew was a precursor of the mana and not the mana itself.

**Numbers 11:9** When the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell with it.

In Exodus 16:14 it says that when the “dew had gone up,” which seems to refer to it drying, it left behind the mana to be gathered.

**Exodus 16:14** And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground.  
<sup>15</sup> When the people 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 that the Lord has given you to eat. <sup>16</sup> This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Gather of it, each one of you, as much as he can eat. You shall each take an omer, according to the number of the persons that each of you has in his tent.’ ” <sup>17</sup> And the people of Israel did so. They gathered, some more, some less. <sup>18</sup> But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat. <sup>19</sup> And Moses said to them, “Let no one leave any of it over till the morning.” <sup>20</sup> But they did not listen to Moses. Some left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them.

The “bread” came with the dew. When the dew was gone, thin flakes were on the desert. Never having seen this before, the people asked, What is it? Because it was sent from heaven the Psalmist Asaph referred to it as “the bread of angels” (Ps. 78:25).

God told them to take an omer (about two quarts) for each person, which the Israelites obediently did. A miracle occurred when they measured their gatherings by the omer standard. Each person had exactly what he

needed. Regardless of how much each gathered, a lot or a little, the omer was always full.

In the New Testament, Jesus compares himself with the manna divinely provided in the wilderness: 'I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. Jesus, referring to the Israelites' manna (John 6:31, 49, 58), called Himself "the true [spiritual] Bread from heaven" (John 6:32), "the Bread of God ... from heaven" (John 6:33), "the Bread of life" (John 6:35, 48), and "the Living Bread ... from heaven" (John 6:51). Everyone who believes in Him, He said, would have eternal life (John 6:33, 51, 58). Jesus is saying that the manna was physical sustenance that kept the Israelites alive temporarily, but He is the real "bread from heaven," and only belief in Him will ensure a person's eternal life.

However, some of the Israelites, failing to obey the next instruction, kept some of it till morning. Because of their lack of faith, God caused their bread to spoil.

**Exodus 16:21** Morning by morning they gathered it, each as much as he could eat; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.

<sup>22</sup> On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each.

And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses,

<sup>23</sup> he said to them, "This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.' " <sup>24</sup> So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it.

<sup>25</sup> Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field. <sup>26</sup> Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none."

<sup>27</sup> On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. <sup>28</sup> And the Lord said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws? <sup>29</sup> See! The Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day." <sup>30</sup> So the people rested on the seventh day.

This is the Bible's first mention of the Sabbath. After His six-day work of Creation God rested on the seventh day (Gen. 2:2–3). The Hebrew words “seventh” and “rested” are similar. Later God's command for the Israelites to rest on the Sabbath became part of the Decalogue (Ex. 20:8–11).

Following the Lord's orders most of the people gathered only enough bread for each day, and twice the amount on the sixth day because the seventh day was to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord. No manna would be given on that day, but part of the bread of the sixth day was to be baked or boiled to preserve it for the seventh day. God had given the seventh day to Israel as a day of rest. That explained the extra amount of the bread of the Lord which he permitted them to gather on the sixth day.

People were not to venture out of their tents on the Sabbath (16:27–30). Disregarding God's instruction some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather the manna. Lack of faith in God's Word is disobedience. The Lord in His displeasure asked them, “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?”

**Exodus 16:31** Now the house of Israel called its name manna. It was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey. <sup>32</sup> Moses said, “This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, so that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.’ ” <sup>33</sup> And Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the Lord to be kept throughout your generations.” <sup>34</sup> As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the testimony to be kept. <sup>35</sup> The people of Israel ate the manna forty years, till they came to a habitable land. They ate the manna till they came to the border of the land of Canaan. <sup>36</sup> (An omer is the tenth part of an ephah.)

The people called the bread “manna” (*mān hū'*, which means “what is it?”). The Bible is rather unclear about what this food is. Exodus 16:31 says it tasted “like wafers made with honey”. It was in thin flakes (like frost) according to Exodus 16:14, while 16:31 says it was white like coriander seed (an herb). Numbers 11:7 says it looked like resin or “bdellium, perhaps meaning it was light-colored and sticky and had a flavor “like the

taste of cakes baked with oil” according to verse 8. Somehow the two “flavors” must have been similar.

Calling it “bread” is more likely describing it as something nourishing in a general sense. In verse 23, the Israelites were told to “bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil” suggesting it can be cooked and consumed in different ways. Some ancient Jewish writings claim manna is the perfect food that gets absorbed into the body entirely, with no extraneous material. In other words, the Israelites would not have needed to defecate while in the wilderness as long as they ate only manna. In short, manna is not like ordinary bread; it falls miraculously from heaven at God’s command to nourish the Israelites in the wilderness.

God told Moses to keep an omer of manna, about two quarts (or 1/10 of an ephah, Ex. 16:36), in a jar, as a reminder of God’s goodness for future generations. At the direction of Moses, Aaron implemented the command to preserve a memorial jar of manna (16:31–34). Aaron collected an omer of manna in a pot and placed it “before Yahweh,” “before the Testimony.” This is a reference to the tables of the Law not having been given at that time. The tablets would later be placed in the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle, which also had not then been built. Future generations would be able to see that which God had provided for his people in the desert.

The Lord continued to supply manna until the nation came to Gilgal where they began to eat the products of the land (Josh. 5:12). The narrator closes the account by noting that the Israelites ate manna for forty years until they reached the border of the Promised Land.