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That Evening Quail Came and Covered the Camp **16: 13-36**

That evening quail came and covered the camp DIG: What were the promises and requirements associated with God's provision of the manna? Why allow some to gather much and some to gather little? Why provide food that only lasts for one day? What was different about the sixth and seventh days? What does this say about the trust relationship God desires?

REFLECT: The Torah commands that Isra'el keep the Sabbath holy. But Isra'el hadn't reached Mount Sinai and the commandments had not yet been given (20:8-11). Why did God teach about the Sabbath here?



That evening quail came and covered the camp (Psalm 78:26-29), and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp (16:13). The habits of **quail** lend itself to the biblical picture. First, the bird flies mostly at night. Secondly, after migration the **birds** are so exhausted that they can be caught with bare hands. Lastly, they make use of favorable winds (**Numbers 11:31**). Like the **manna**, the amount of **quail** in and around the **Hebrew** camp was astounding.³⁰⁵ **God rained meat down on them like dust, flying birds like sand on the seashore (Psalm 78:27).** The **Holy Spirit** spends most of **His** time here describing the **manna** because everyone knows what **quail** is. But **manna** is quite a different story.

When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor (16:14). The miracle was that **the manna** was found in such giant quantities. **To feed two million people, they would have needed about nine million pounds of manna per day; that equals about forty-five hundred tons per day, or about a million tons annually for forty years.** All very remarkably scheduled every morning! So any natural cause would seem to be quite a stretch.

When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other: **What is it?** In Hebrew, this is two words, *man hu*, translated **“What is it?”** **For they did not know what it was. Moses** said to them: **It is the bread God has given you to eat (16:15).** **Psalm 78:23-25 describes it as the grain of heaven and the bread of angels.**

This is what ADONAI has commanded to you: Each one is to gather as much as he needs. This was exactly the formula given at **the Egyptian Passover** (see [By - The Egyptian Passover](#)). **Take an omer**, probably about two quarts, **for each person you have in your tent (16:16).** The point was that no one should hoard any food. **An omer is one tenth of an ephah (16:36).** It should *not* be assumed that **manna** was the only thing **the Israelites** ate for forty years. We must remember that they brought large flocks and herds with them out of **Egypt (12:38; 17:3).** They continued to possess these not only in Sinai (**34:3**) but had them when they reached Edom and the country east of the Jordan (**Deuteronomy 2:6-7**). That wheat and meats were available to them is clearly implied in such references as **Exodus 17:3, 24:5, 34:3; Leviticus 8:2, 26, 31, 9:4, 10:12, 24:5; and Numbers 7:13, 19).**³⁰⁶

The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little (16:17). **And when they measure it by the omer, each person who gathered much did not have too much, and each person who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as needed to be satisfied from hunger (16:18).** Paul cites this as an illustration for believers who share their possessions with each other (**Second Corinthians 8:15**).

However, the greed of some **Hebrews** caused some to keep what **they** had collected over night. **Then Moses** said to **them**, **“No one is to keep any of it until morning,” but should trust in God that He would provide for them each and every day (16:19).** **No one was duty bound to eat the whole omer, but what was not eaten was supposed to be thrown away. However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but when morning came they discovered that it was full of maggots and began to smell.** This seems to be a deliberate allusion to the first plague on

Egypt in which the Nile was contaminated and smelled (7:18). **So Moses was angry with them (16:20)**. There is no stronger verb in the Hebrew to reflect wrath or anger, than the one used here. The Hebrews were again living by sight and not by faith.³⁰⁷

The **manna** had to be gathered early in **the morning** because when **the sun grew hot, it melted away**. **Each morning everyone gathered as much as he needed (16:21)**. **The rabbis teach that what was left in the field melted and flowed away in streams. Animals drank of it, and these animals were hunted by other peoples who, by eating the flesh, experienced the taste of the manna and thereby appreciated Israel's honor**. But a different rule applied to the **Sabbath**. **On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much - two omers for each person - and the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses (16:22)**.

God not only supplied food for **the people of Isra'el**, **He** also provided rest. **He** said to them: **This is what ADONAI commanded to you: Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to ADONAI. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning** because it would not be spoiled (16:23). **So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it (16:24)**. Any other time if it were left overnight, it would have decayed, but not on **the seventh day**. **Moses** said: **Eat today because today is a Sabbath to ADONAI. You will not find any of it on the ground today (16:25)**. **Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any manna on the ground** for you to eat (16:26). Therefore, the concept of **the Sabbath** was given even before the children of **Isra'el** arrived at Mount Sinai.

Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none (16:27). Then **ADONAI** said to **Moses** **His** servant: **How long will you refuse to keep My commands and instructions about the Sabbath (16:28)?** **Moses** asked **Pharaoh** a similar question: **How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me (10:3)?** **The Israelites**, therefore, were stubbornly disregarding the Word of **God** like **Amenhotep II**. And if **they** continued to rebel, **they** would receive the same diseases that fell like plagues upon the people of **Egypt (15:26)**.

God Himself spoke and announced that **the Sabbath** is a divine gift to **His** people. **Bear in mind that ADONAI has given you the Sabbath; this why on the sixth day He gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where they are on the seventh day; no one is to go out to gather manna (16:29)**. **So the people rested**, the Hebrew word *sabat*, **on the seventh day**, the Hebrew word *seba* (16:30). Today **the people of Isra'el**

call the Sabbath the *shabbat*, or *rest*. **Moses** would then gave some editorial commentary regarding the giving of **manna** throughout the rest of the desert wanderings.

First, he summarized the previous material from this chapter. **The people of Isra'el called the bread manna. It was white like a round coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey (16:31). Numbers 11:8** describes its taste as **something made with olive oil.**

ADONAI commanded Moses to take an omer of manna and keep it for the generations to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the desert when I brought you out of Egypt. It served as a continual reminder of **God's** provision for **His people** in **their** time of need. Then **Aaron** took a golden **jar filled with manna** and **put it in the ark, that it might be kept** for future **generations (Exodus 16:32-34; Hebrews 9:4)**. **Moses** inserted this when he wrote the book of **Exodus** to show that **the Hebrews** did fulfill the commands **God gave** when **the manna** was given to **them**. **The rabbis teach that these verses should logically follow the account of the erection of the Tabernacle, but is placed here to stress the miracle of the manna.**

The Israelites ate manna for forty years, until they came to a Land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan (16:35). The number **forty** became a symbol of hardship and trial (**Genesis 7:12; First Samuel 17:16; Matthew 4:2**). Once in **Canaan**, they no longer needed **manna** when they celebrated their first Passover. As a result, **God** stopped supplying it (**Joshua 5:10-12**).

In **Deuteronomy 8:4** we find that during the **forty years** that **the Israelites** wandered in **the desert their** feet did not swell. One of the common causes of foot-swelling in the Orient is an improper diet. It is interesting that the **manna** had all the vitamins and minerals that they needed to keep their feet from swelling as **they** journeyed through the desert. The **manna** was adequate to meet **their** needs.³⁰⁸

But **God** had a much greater purpose for giving **manna** to **the children of Isra'el** than merely to feed **them**. **Moses** later commented that: **He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God . . . He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you (Deuteronomy 8:3 and 16)**. The most important reason that **manna** was given was to teach **His people** to depend on **Him** and **His Word**. Our continued existence depends on **Him** and **Him** alone. When Satan tempted **Jesus** to turn



stones into bread during **His** forty days of fasting, **Jesus** answered: **It is written that man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4).**