

## 17. EXODUS 15:22-16:36

In the introduction to the second part of his *Bible Student's Commentary* on the book of Exodus, Dr. W H Gispen remarks: "The first part of Exodus (1:1-15:21) describes the LORD's leading Israel out of Egypt. This second section deals with the making of the covenant at Sinai and ends with the LORD's coming down to live visibly among His people, which was the purpose of the Exodus (cf 29:46)." We also refer to what follows in the informative introduction of this part of the Bible Student's Commentary (page 8).

We agree with his division of the book of Exodus; the second part begins at chapter 15:22. After the passage through the sea is completed, the LORD leads His people on to Mount Sinai, where He makes His Covenant of grace with Israel.

In the Covenant of His Grace; all the decrees and laws which we are about to read are *filled with His grace*. (cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 19)

*Verses 22-24.* "So Moses brought Israel..."

After the miracle at the Red Sea; after the song of praise for Him Who had performed this miracle.

With the use of a map it can be seen that God's people travelled in a south-easterly direction, with the Red Sea on the right.

Try to imagine it: they travelled through the wilderness for three days without coming across any water. Hunger is terrible, but thirst is unbearable.

When they arrive at Marah, the water there is found to be bitter. Undrinkable.

'Marah' means 'bitter'; cf. Ruth 1:20.

It is not known whether Moses knew that this spring produced bitter water; we may say with certainty, however, that the LORD purposely caused this disappointment for His people (end of verse 25).

For the second time the people grumbled against Moses (compare Exodus 10-12).

*Verses 25-27.* As with Israel's first complaint, Moses again cries to the LORD (cf. Exodus 14:15).

The LORD hears; when Moses throws a piece of wood – pointed out to him by the LORD – into the water, it becomes sweet and drinkable.

However, this is not the only thing the LORD does here for His people. Verse 25b: “He made a statute and an ordinance for them...” That means: rules and norms by which to live. It is summarised in verse 26; the people must listen, constantly heed the voice of the LORD. Also in the wilderness, faith comes from HEARING (Romans 10:14-17, cf. Canons of Dort V, Art 14).

We can speak of *the golden rule* for the life of God’s people, with emphasis on the promise: “**If** you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God... I will...; for I am the LORD who heals you.” (See Psalm 103:1-5, 14-18)

What the LORD promises here, He fulfils at Marah and again at the next campsite (verse 27).

At the beginning of the journey through the wilderness, the God of the Exodus and of the crossing of the sea, taught His people that there was no need for anxiety in the wilderness, that there was no need for fear. (Compare the promise of Isaiah 33:16, Matthew 6:25-34.)

This is the answer to His servant Moses’ prayer, even though the people had forfeited His grace by their unfaithful grumbling.

*Exodus 16:1-3.* The journey *through the wilderness* could now continue. The Israelites knew exactly what they could count on, and what rules they were to keep.

The journey is continued. See *Bible Student’s Commentary* (page 155) for the location of the places mentioned.

In this desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron (for the third time) in an extremely ungodly manner. Although they had experienced such great miracles by the *Hand of their God*, in their grumbings they dare to speak against that Hand, “if only that Hand had struck us dead when we wallowed in prosperity in Egypt.” (cf. Exodus 2:23)

They condemned Moses and Aaron as the perpetrators of a disastrous undertaking, a journey doomed to failure.

Where in these murmurings is faith in the God of the Exodus, of the Red Sea and in the Healer of Marah?

Israel fears death by starvation whilst under the care of **this** God!

*Verses 4-5.* The LORD speaks to Moses, who, undoubtedly, had called on Him in the distress brought upon him by the people: "Behold (!), I will rain bread from heaven for you."

By means of this miracle, the LORD wants to test His people (notice what follows); at the same time He does not put the weekly celebration of the Sabbath at risk (verse 5).

Note: therefore Israel kept the Sabbath **before** Exodus 20.

A clear proof that the Sabbath was an ordinance of the LORD in Paradise (see Genesis 2:2,3).

*Verses 6-8.* Moses and Aaron convey the LORD's answer to the people. "At evening you shall know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt." This journey through the desert is not just an undertaking by Moses and Aaron (verse 8b). The LORD will uncover the enormity of your sin! "...in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD": the imposing splendour of His light, the proof that He is present among His people (Exodus 24:17; 40:34-38).

*Verses 9-12.* At Moses' command, the entire congregation was called together in what we would call an official worship service, *before the face of the LORD.*

"Behold (!), the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud." From the midst of this divine revelation they hear the Word of God to Moses: "I have heard the complaints of the children 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'."

Note that the LORD speaks to Moses about the people; *only through the mediator whom God had given* is there contact between the Holy One and this repeatedly unbelieving people.

*Verses 13-18.* The LORD gives the miracle of bread from heaven, and of meat in the form of quails.

The bread: "...a small round substance, as fine as frost on the ground."

It made them say to each other, "What is it?" This is also translated by some as: This is nothing. We were promised bread, but this isn't bread! Moses provides the answer: "This is the bread

which the LORD has given you to eat...Let every man gather it according to each one's need..." (verse 16).

One omer (2.2 litres) per person.

The miracles multiply (see verse 17-18); compare this with what Paul later writes to the Church at Corinth (2 Corinthians 8:15).

*Verses 19-24.* God's fatherly care for the daily sustenance of His people in the desert was tangible.

He tests His people while He provides His good care (verse 4). The rule He gave for gathering the bread from heaven can be summed up as: having to live out of His merciful Hand, day by day (verse 19).

Some found this to be too much of a risk (verse 20). They were tested, but they disappointed the LORD. They found death in the manna-pot; "and Moses was angry with them." A holy anger because of their unbelief, their lack of trust in the LORD regarding their daily bread. In obedience to the LORD's commands and laws (verse 25 of the previous chapter, see also Exodus 16:5), the Israelites gathered twice as much on the sixth day.

The rulers of the congregation reported this to Moses. There is no reason why we should not call this a pleasing report; pleasing, because in this instance the Israelites evidently heeded the LORD's command.

We now read verses 23-34 in this light; the LORD verified his Word, also concerning the keeping of the Sabbath.

*Verses 25-31.* On the weekly day of rest and in this particular situation, the man of God reminds the people of the command to keep the Sabbath, focusing attention on the fact that no manna will be found on the Sabbath.

The people can eat what had been gathered on the previous day; it has not gone bad (cf. verse 20).

Not all in Israel were obedient to the LORD (verse 27). They got what they deserved: when they went out to gather the bread from heaven, they did not find any.

The LORD addresses Moses in His displeasure over this unbelief (verse 28).

Again we point out that the LORD Himself emphasises the fact that He *had given* the Sabbath. He did not first institute this day

of rest when He made His covenant with Israel in the Ten Words. See what was mentioned previously (verses 4-5).

The keeping of the Sabbath is accentuated in this particular situation with the words, "Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day." 'Place' in this case means 'camp'. Remember that the manna came down outside the camp!

Israel observed the Sabbath (verse 30).

Verse 31 tells us that this bread from heaven was called Manna; it also describes what it looked like and how it tasted.

It is striking that here, for the first time, we read of *the house of Israel*. For this description of God's people see Exodus 40:38; Leviticus 10:6; 17:3,8,10; 22:18; Numbers 20:29; Joshua 21:45. This name announces that the people, who were slaves a while ago, have now become a community, a house in which the LORD soon will live.

*Verses 32-34.* Moses passes on a command from the LORD; Aaron puts it into effect: an omer of manna is to be kept before the LORD, so that the generations to come will know that the LORD made sure His people lacked nothing in the desert, **and** that He brought them out of the house of bondage.

This jar filled with manna is to be kept before the face of the LORD, before the Testimony: the law of the Covenant (verses 33-34).

We concur with the author of the *Bible Student's Commentary* that this divine command must have been given later, and that its execution also occurred later than the event described in Exodus 16. It must have been after the making of the Covenant; after the building of the tabernacle.

*Verses 35-36.* The remarks concerning both previous verses are confirmed by these last two verses. These must also be later additions, i.e. after the forty years of life in the desert. (See Joshua 5:12)

## ***QUESTIONS***

- 1 How does Christ later speak about manna? See John 6.
- 2 How does Christ teach his disciples the lesson of Exodus 16? See Matthew 6:25-34, especially verse 33.
- 3 How does Christ Himself believe in His Father in relation to Exodus 16? See Matthew 4:1-4.
- 4 How does Paul relate God's revelation regarding the gathering of the manna to his call to give liberally to a sister church? See 2 Corinthians 8:12-15.
- 5 Does Israel's gathering of a double portion of manna on Friday convey a message to us concerning the Sunday-observance in our families?