

Manna in the Old Testament

Manna is first mentioned before Israel reached the mountain where Moses was to receive the Law. The people were complaining about the lack of food and wishing they were back in the slavery of Egypt. Then God told Moses, *"Behold, I will 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 or not they will walk in My instruction"* (Exodus 16:4). This "statement of purpose" is often overlooked in our studies. God satisfies a need in such a way that it tests the faithfulness of the one receiving the blessing. Miraculously supplying food and giving them simple instructions shows how the people will adapt to the commandments, ordinances, and judgments He will deliver through Moses. For the next 40 years, Israel demonstrated that they would not follow God's instructions and previewed their next 800 years in the promised land.

Three places in the Five Books of Moses tell us about Manna and God's purpose in sending it to Israel. The first is the description in Exodus 16. Manna appeared as "a fine, flake-like thing" similar to frost on the ground. It was the size of a coriander seed but white, and it had to be collected before it melted away by the sun. Exodus also relates that the raw Manna tasted like wafers made with honey, but when baked, it tasted like cakes made with oil.

The second passage is Numbers 11, describing the greedy and ungrateful. Numbers also says that Manna came with the dew during the night and remained when the dew evaporated. This account compares Manna's consistency to an ingredient used in incense that must be ground into a powder before making cakes for food.

The third passage is part of Moses' final warnings to the people before entering the promised land. In Deuteronomy 8, Moses describes the 40-year wilderness wandering and the nearly continuous grumbling of the people. Speaking specifically of Manna, Moses said, *"You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD"* (Deuteronomy 8:2-3).

There are many lessons about Manna; how it looked and tasted and was gathered and used. All the physical attributes of Manna can be related to things we might encounter at some point in our lives. The gathering of food, either from the field or store to the preparation of ingredients following a recipe. But what is the test? God said to gather a day's supply for five days and a two-day supply on the sixth day. No gathering on the seventh day should be allowed. This command preceded the Sabbath Law given in (Exodus 20:8) and (Leviticus 23:3). The attitude of the people, however, was revealed on the first seventh day, *"Now it happened that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none. And the LORD said to Moses, 'How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?'"* (Exodus 16:27-28).

A few Old Testament writers refer to manna as they instruct and encourage the Israelites. Nehemiah referred to their disobedience to God's instructions in His prayer for forgiveness as the people of his time confessed their sins. *"Yet in Your manifold mercies You did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of the cloud did not depart from them by day, To lead them on the road; Nor the pillar of fire by*

night, To show them light, And the way they should go. You also gave Your good Spirit to instruct them, And did not withhold Your Manna from their mouth, And gave them water for their thirst. Forty years You sustained them in the wilderness; They lacked nothing; Their clothes did not wear out And their feet did not swell (Nehemiah 9:19-21). Even though they were sinful and rebellious, God still cared for them and fed them from heaven.

The Psalmists used the story of Israel's unbelief and God's continued love and care to encourage and warn future generations to heed God's words. Psalm 78 is devoted to the history of God caring for His people even as they did not honor or obey Him. In one part of that Psalm is a specific reminder of Manna. *"They did not believe in God, And did not trust in His salvation. Yet He had commanded the clouds above, And opened the doors of heaven, Had rained down manna on them to eat"* (Psalms 78:22-25). And looking forward to the Spiritual Food that Christ would bring, Malachi records, *"Try Me now in this," Says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it"* (Malachi 3:10).

Is there Manna for us?