



### **EXODUS 16-18 THE REMINDER OF THE SABBATH; QUAIL; DELEGATION**

As we begin in chapter 16 of Exodus, it is important to note this is one of the proof texts about *Sabbath keeping*. As God had promised Abraham several hundred years before (Gen. 15:13-21), He liberated on time the Israelites from a terrible slavery and was now taking them to the Promised Land. On the way, He would test and teach them more about His laws, many of which had been neglected, and had great plans for them to become the future teachers of His laws to the rest of the world.

One of those laws largely forgotten was the Sabbath observance God had instituted at the beginning of man's creation (Gen. 2:1-3). We read in Genesis that man continued to observe the seven-day week (Gen. 7:10; 8:10, 12). Abraham also "obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws" (Gen. 26:5), which would include the Sabbath command of keeping it holy and as a day of rest.

Now, in Exodus 16, God reminds the Israelites of this Sabbath command. After the Israelites complained of not having enough food, since a month had now passed, (Ex. 16:1), God told them through Moses they would be miraculously fed with manna every day except the Sabbath, and would eat quail that evening.

It is interesting that quail are known in the area, and these savory birds fly south every autumn from Europe to the Sinai peninsula, North Africa and Egypt. They have been depicted in Egyptian murals for millennia.

God then said: "And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may *test* them, whether they will walk in My law or not. And it shall be on the *sixth day* that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be *twice* as much as they gather daily... '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. So it was that quails came up at *evening* and covered the camp'" (Ex. 16:12-13). We see here that the Sabbath is a *test commandment* to see if we are willing to obey God.

By the way, the preceding two verses show the terms "twilight" or "between the evenings" (*beyn ha arbayim*) and "evening" (*ba erev*) are *similar* in meaning. They *both* refer to the time beginning at *sunset*. This shows the idea that evening can begin at 12:00 noon or 3:00 p.m. is wrong for the taking of the Passover, since it must be done *after sunset* as Exodus 12:6 says, "Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it [the Passover lamb] at *twilight*." The quail began to arrive in the camp *at evening*, and not during the day. So even though one of the terms is a point in time—*evening--(ba*

*erev)* and the other—*twilight-- (beyn ha arbayim)* is a period of time, they both *start* at the same moment, and are important indicators of *when* to take the Passover. That is why Christ waited till *the hour* had come to take the Passover (Luke 21:14-15).

So they ate the quail that night, and in the morning, a wonderful bread-like substance surrounded their camp. "So when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?'... And Moses said to them, 'This is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat.'... And the house of Israel called its name Manna [what is it?]. And it was like white coriander seed, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey" (Ex. 16:15, 31).

*The JFB Commentary* notes, "There is a gum of the same name distilled in this desert region from the tamarisk, which is much prized by the natives, and preserved carefully by those who gather it. It is collected early in the morning, melts under the heat of the sun, and is congealed by the cold of night. In taste it is as sweet as honey, and has been supposed by distinguished travelers, from its whitish color, time, and place of its appearance, to be the manna on which the Israelites were fed: so that, according to the views of some, it was a production indigenous to the desert; according to others, there was a miracle, which consisted, however, only in the preternatural arrangements regarding its supply. But more recent and accurate examination has proved this gum of the tarfa-tree to be wanting in all the principal characteristics of the Scriptural manna. It exudes only in small quantities, and not every year; it can't be baked or boiled (Ex 16:23).

"Though it may evaporate by the heat and afterwards fall with the dew, it is *a medicine*, not food. It is well known to the natives of the desert, while the Israelites were strangers to theirs; and in taste as well as in the appearance of double quantity on Friday, none on Sabbath, and in not breeding worms, it is essentially *different* from the manna furnished to the Israelites. The mere fact of such a multitude being fed for forty years in the wilderness, where no food of any kind is to be obtained, will show the utter impossibility of their subsisting on a natural production of the kind and quantity as this tarfa-gum and, as if for the purpose of removing all such groundless speculations, Aaron was commanded to put a sample of it in a pot—a golden pot (Heb 9:4)—to be laid before the Testimony and kept for future generations, that they might see the bread on which the Lord fed their fathers in the wilderness."

Notice now the reminder about the Sabbath commandment. "Then he said to them, 'This is what the Lord has said, 'Tomorrow is *a Sabbath rest*, a *holy*

Sabbath to the Lord. Bake what you will bake today, and boil what you will boil, and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning.’ So they laid it up till morning, as Moses commanded; and it did not stink, nor were there any worms in it. Then Moses said, ‘Eat that today, for today is *a Sabbath to the Lord*, today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none. 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?’ See! For *the Lord has given you the Sabbath* [it is not Jewish or a man-made institution!]; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place on the seventh day.’ So the people rested on the seventh day” (Ex. 16:23-30).

Several days out, having eaten the delicious quail, and now having manna every day that miraculously sustained them, they entered a very arid area around Rephidim and started murmuring and rebelling for the third time. *The JFB Commentary* notes, “Rephidim, now believed, on good grounds, to be Wady Feiran, which is exactly a day’s march from Mount Sinai, and at the entrance of the Horeb district. It is a long circuitous defile about forty feet in breadth, with perpendicular granite rocks on both sides. The wilderness of Sin through which they approached to this valley is very barren, has an *extremely dry and thirsty aspect*, little or no water, scarcely even a dwarfish shrub to be seen, and the only shelter to the panting pilgrims is under the shadow of the great overhanging cliffs.”

The Bible says, “And the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, ‘Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?’ So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, ‘What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me!’ And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. ‘Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock of Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.’ And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. So he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the contention of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the Lord, saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’” (Ex. 17:3-7).

Rephidim, which appears to be this Wady Feiran, now thanks to the abundant water, was turned from a parched wilderness to the *only oasis* in this region.

“Rephidim,” says Werner Keller, “is now Feiran, extolled by Arabs as the ‘Pearl of the Sinai.’...A small

grove of palms trees provides welcome shade. As they have always done since the days of their remote ancestors, the nomads bring their flocks here to drink and rest on the tiny grass carpet” (*The Bible as History*, p. 130).

The sudden abundance of water in such a dry region astounded everyone. Soon, the Amalekites, nomadic inhabitants of the region and descendants of Esau (Gen. 36:12, 16), attacked the Israelites (Ex. 17:8). One of the reasons could have been when they found out of the newly discovered source of water, that was more precious than gold, or it could have been because the Israelites were approaching their pastureland. Whatever reason it was, the attack was unprovoked. God deeply resented this kinfolk cruelly attacking the Israelites.

“So Joshua did as Moses said to him, and fought with Amalek. And Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed, and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses hand became heavy, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. And Aaron and Hur supported his hands...So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword” (Ex. 17:10-13). Here we have the principle of supporting the leaders in the church by “holding up their hands.” This is symbolically done through prayers, having faith in God’s church and an active support in God’s work.

Because of Amalek’s treacherous and unprovoked attack, God, who reads the heart (or motives), pronounced a curse on them. “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.’”

After this, Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, a high priest of the Midianites, who also inhabited this region, came to see him. “And Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness...And Moses told his father-in-law all that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel’s sake, all the hardship that had come upon them on the way, and how the Lord had delivered them. Then Jethro rejoiced for all the good which the Lord had done for Israel...and said, ‘Blessed be the Lord, who has delivered you...Now I know that the Lord is greater than all the gods; for in the very thing in which they behaved proudly, He was above them...And so it was, on the next day, that Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood before Moses from morning until *evening*. So when Moses’ father-in-law saw all that he did for the people, he said, ‘What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit, and all the people stand before you from morning until evening? [Here is

another example of using the term “evening” to mean sunset]” (Ex. 18:5-14).

Jethro’s advice to Moses in order to avoid burnout was to properly delegate his authority. He said, “Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. (1) And you shall *teach them* the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. (2) Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. (3) And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. (4) So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you” (18:19-23).

We see here the classic rules for proper delegation, and mentioned by Stephen Covey, the management guru, in his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, p. 174:

- **Guidelines**—Teach them the principles first, (they are to judge based on God’s laws).
- **Resources**—Identify the human, financial, technical, or organizational resources, (men such as fear God, of truth, hating covetousness).
- **Accountability**—Set up standards of performance that will be used in evaluating the results, (place such over them to be rulers of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they shall judge).
- **Consequences**—Specify what will happen, both good and bad, (So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you).

Moses, who was so humble (Numbers 12:3), after consulting with God and receiving His approval, accepted his father-in-law’s advice.

Moses mentions in Deut. 1:12-15, “And you answered me and said, ‘The thing which you have told us to do is good.’ So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and knowledgeable men, and made them heads over you, leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties, leaders of tens, and officers of your tribes.”

It is interesting to note that although there are many variations to this pattern, it is still a basic principle in the government of the church.

One man can’t do it all, and authority is delegated among “wise and knowledgeable men who fear God,

men of truth, hating covetousness.” Notice these are many of the qualifications necessary to be an elder, according to 1 Timothy 3:1-4 and Titus 1:5-9 and also a deacon.

We have first of all, in this spiritual delegation, God the Father, and Jesus Christ under Him. Then, on earth, we have a Council of Elders and a president that preside over the hundreds of congregations and thousands of brethren around the world—not as overlords, but “as fellow workers for your joy” (2 Cor. 1:24) and so everything can be done, “decently and in order” (1 Thes. 14:40). Then we have regional pastors over “hundreds,” pastors over “fifties,” local elders over “tens,” and deacons and deaconesses under them to better *serve* everyone, without the burden falling on only a few.

Just as Israel was the “church in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38), so the New Testament church has many of the same parallels, for God is involved in instructing both. As people learn first to “carry their own burden” through their example and understanding, they can be trained to serve others, and eventually, assume more positions of responsibility, according to how God works through their fruits and His desire for them to be placed in certain parts of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-31).

We read in Exodus 18:24-26, “So Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people: rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. So they judged the people at all times; the hard cases they brought to Moses, but they judged every small case themselves. Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went his way to his own land” (18:24-27).

It is interesting that this same pattern is largely followed today in the U.S. in the judicial system, where you have local courts, state courts, federal courts, and finally, the Supreme court to deal with court cases, from the most minor to the most difficult.

Next time, we will cover the section on God’s Ten Commandments, and the rest of His holy laws.