

# NOTES ON THE BOOK OF EXODUS

by

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## Exodus 16

**“And they took their journey from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came unto the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure out of the land of Egypt”** (Chap. 16:1).

Here we find Israel in a very marked and interesting position. It is still the wilderness, no doubt, but it is a most important and significant stage thereof, namely, **“between Elim and Sinai.”**

The former was the place where they had so recently experienced the refreshing springs of divine ministry; the latter was the place where they entirely got off the ground of free and sovereign grace, and placed themselves under a covenant of works.

These facts render **“the wilderness of Sin”** a singularly interesting portion of Israel’s journey. Its features and influences are as strongly marked as those of any point in their whole career. They are here seen as the subjects of the same grace which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, and, therefore, all their murmurings are instantly met by divine supplies. When God acts in the display of His grace, there is no hindrance. The streams of blessing which emanate from Him, flow onward without interruption. It is only when man puts himself under law that he forfeits everything; for then God must allow him to prove how much he can claim on the ground of his own works.

When God visited and redeemed His people, and brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, it assuredly was not for the purpose of suffering them to die of hunger and thirst in the wilderness. They should have known this. They ought to have trusted Him, and walked in the confidence of that love which had so gloriously delivered them from the horrors of Egyptian bondage. They should have remembered that it was infinitely better to be in the desert with God, than in the brick-kilns with Pharaoh. But no; the human heart finds it immensely difficult to give God credit for pure and perfect love. It has far more confidence in Satan than God.

Look, for a moment, at all the sorrow and suffering, the misery and degradation which man has endured by reason of his having hearkened to the voice of Satan, and yet he never gives utterance to a word of complaint of his service, or of desire to escape from under his hand.

He is not discontented with Satan, or weary of serving him. Again and again, he reaps bitter fruits in those fields which Satan has thrown open to him; and yet, again and again, he may be seen sowing the self-same seed, and undergoing the self-same labours.

How different it is in reference to God!

When we have set out to walk in His ways, we are ready, at the earliest appearance of pressure or trial, to murmur and rebel. Indeed, there is nothing in which we so signally fail as in the cultivation of a confiding and thankful spirit. Ten thousand mercies are forgotten in the presence of one single trying privation. We have been frankly forgiven all our sins, **“accepted in the Beloved,”** made heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, the expectants of eternal glory; and, in addition to all, our path through the desert is strewn with countless mercies; and yet let but a cloud, the size of a man’s hand, appear on the horizon, and we at once forget the rich mercies of the past in view of this single cloud, which, after all, may only “break in blessings on our head.”

The thought of this should humble us deeply in the presence of God. How unlike we are in this, as in every other respect, to our blessed Exemplar! Look at Him - the true Israel in the wilderness - surrounded by wild beasts, and fasting for forty days. How did He carry Himself? Did He murmur? Did He complain of His lot? Did He wish Himself in other circumstances? Ah! no. God was the portion of His cup and the lot of His inheritance (Psalm 16). And, therefore, when the tempter approached and offered Him the necessaries, the glories, the distinctions, and the honours of this life, He refused them all, and tenaciously held fast the position of absolute dependence upon God and implicit obedience to His word. He would only take bread from God and glory from Him likewise.

Very different was it with Israel after the flesh! No sooner did they feel the pressure of hunger than **“they murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.”**

They seemed to have actually lost the sense of having been delivered by the hand of the Lord, for they said, **“Ye have brought us forth into this wilderness.”** And, again, in Exodus 17, **“the people murmured against Moses and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt to kill us, and our children, and our cattle with thirst?”** Thus did they, on every occasion, evince a fretful, murmuring spirit, and prove how little they realized the presence and the hand of their Almighty and infinitely gracious Deliverer.

Now, nothing is more dishonouring to God than the manifestation of a complaining spirit on the part of those that belong to Him.

The apostle gives it as a special mark of Gentile corruption that, **“when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful.”** Then follows the practical result of this unthankful spirit. **“They became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened”** (Romans 1:2).

The heart that ceases to retain a thankful sense of God’s goodness will speedily become “dark.”

Thus Israel lost the sense of being in God's hands; and this led, as might be expected, to still thicker darkness, for we find them, further on in their history, saying, "**Wherefore hath the Lord brought us into this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children shall be a prey?**" (Numbers 14:3).

Such is the line along which a soul out of communion will travel.

- It first loses the sense of being in God's hands for good, and,
- Finally, begins to deem itself in His hands for evil.

Melancholy progress this! However, the people being so far the subjects of grace, are provided for; and our chapter furnishes the marvellous account of this provision.

"**Then said the Lord unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you.**" They, when enveloped in the chilling cloud of their unbelief, had said, "**Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh-pots, and when we did eat bread to the full.**" But now the word is, "**bread from heaven.**" Blessed contrast! How amazing the difference between the Flesh-pots, the leeks, onions, and garlic of Egypt, and this heavenly manna - "**angels' food!**" The former belonged to earth, the latter to Heaven.

But, then, this heavenly food was, of necessity, a test of Israel's condition, as we read, "**That I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law or no.**" It needed a heart weaned from Egypt's influences, to be satisfied with, or enjoy "**bread from heaven.**"

In point of fact, we know that the people were not satisfied with it, but despised it, pronounced it "**light food,**" and lusted for flesh. Thus they proved how little their hearts were delivered from Egypt, or disposed to walk in God's law. "**In their hearts they turned back again into Egypt**" (Acts 7:39). But, instead of getting back thither, they were, ultimately, carried away beyond Babylon (Acts 7:43).

This is a solemn and salutary lesson for Christians.

If those who are redeemed from this present world, do not walk with God in thankfulness of heart, satisfied with His provision for the redeemed in the wilderness, they are in danger of falling into the snare of Babylonish influence. This is a serious consideration. It demands a heavenly taste to feed on bread from Heaven. Nature cannot relish such food. It will ever yearn after Egypt, and, therefore, it must be kept down.

It is our privilege, as those who have been baptized into Christ's death, and "**risen again through the faith of the operation of God,**" to feed upon Christ as "**the bread of life which came down from heaven.**" This is our wilderness food - Christ as ministered by the Holy Ghost, through the written Word; while, for our spiritual refreshment, the Holy Ghost has come down, as the precious fruit of the smitten Rock - Christ, as smitten for us. Such is our rare portion, in this desert world. Now, it is obvious that, in order to enjoy such a portion as this, our hearts must be weaned from everything in this present evil world - from all that would address itself to us as natural men - as men alive in the flesh.

A worldly heart - a carnal mind, would neither find Christ in the Word, nor enjoy Him if found. The manna was so pure and delicate that it could not bear contact with earth. It fell upon the dew (see Numbers 11:9), and had to be gathered ere the sun was up. Each one, therefore, had to rise early and seek his daily portion. So it is with the people of God now. The heavenly manna must be gathered fresh every morning. Yesterdays manna will not do for today, nor today's for tomorrow. We must feed upon Christ every day, with fresh energy of the Spirit, else we shall cease to grow.

Moreover, we must make Christ our primary object. We must seek Him "early," before "other things" have had time to take possession of our poor susceptible hearts. Many of us, alas! fail in this. We give Christ a secondary place, and the consequence is, we are left feeble and barren. The enemy, ever watchful, takes advantage of our excessive spiritual indolence to rob us of the blessedness and strength which flow from feeding upon Christ. The new life in the believer can only be nourished and sustained by Christ. **"As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me"** (John 6:57).

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the One who came down from Heaven, to be His people's food is ineffably precious to the renewed soul; but, in order to enjoy Him thus, we need to realize ourselves, as in the wilderness, separated to God, in the power of accomplished redemption. If I am walking with God through the desert, I shall be satisfied with the food which He provides, and that is, Christ as come down from Heaven.

**"The old corn of the land of Canaan"** has its antitype in Christ ascended up on high, and seated in the glory. As such, He is the proper food of those who by faith, know themselves as raised up together and seated together with Him in the heavenlies. But the manna, that is, Christ as come down from Heaven, is for the people of God, in their wilderness life and experience.

As a people journeying down here, we need a Christ who also journeyed down here; as a people seated in spirit up there, we have a Christ who is seated up there. This may help to explain the difference between the manna and the old corn of the land. It is not a question of redemption; that we have in the blood of the Cross, and there alone. It is simply the provision which God has made for His people, according to their varied attitudes, whether as actually toiling in the desert, or in spirit taking possession of the heavenly inheritance.

*What a striking picture is presented by Israel in the wilderness!*

Egypt was behind them, Canaan before them, and the sand of the desert around them; while they themselves were called to look up to Heaven for their daily supply. The wilderness afforded not one blade of grass nor one drop of water for the Israel of God. In the Lord alone was their portion. Most touching illustration of God's pilgrim people in this wilderness world! They have nothing here. Their life, being heavenly, can only be sustained by heavenly things. Though in the world, they are not of it, for Christ has chosen them out of it. As a Heaven-born people, they are on their way to their birth-place, and sustained by food sent from thence. Theirs is an upward and an onward course. The glory leads only thus.

It is utterly vain to cast the eye backward in the direction of Egypt; not a ray of the glory can there be discerned. **“They looked toward the wilderness, and behold the glory of the Lord appeared in the clouds.”** The Lord’s chariot was in the wilderness, and all who desired companionship with Him should be there likewise; and, if there, the heavenly manna should be their food, and that alone.

True, this manna was strange sustenance, such as an Egyptian could never understand, appreciate, or live upon; but those who had been **“baptized in the cloud and in the sea,”** could, if walking in consistency with that significant baptism, enjoy and be nourished by it.

*Thus is it now in the case of the true believer.*

The worldling cannot understand how he lives. Both his life and that which sustains it lie entirely beyond the range of nature’s keenest vision. Christ is his life, and on Christ he lives. He feeds, by faith, upon the powerful attractions of one who, though being **“God over all, blessed for ever,”** **“took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men”** (Philippians 2:7). He traces Him from the bosom of the Father to the Cross, and from the Cross to the throne, and finds Him, in every stage of His journey, and in every attitude of His life, to be most precious food for his new man. All around, though, in fact, Egypt, is morally a waste howling wilderness, affording nothing for the renewed mind; and, just in proportion as the Christian finds any material to feed upon, must his spiritual man be hindered in his progress. The only provision which God has made is the heavenly manna, and on this the true believer should ever feed.

*It is truly deplorable to find Christians seeking after the things of this world.*

It proves, very distinctly, that they are “loathing” the heavenly manna, and esteeming it “light food.” They are ministering to that which they ought to mortify. The activities of the new life will ever show themselves in connection with the subjugation of **“the old man with his deeds;”** and the more that is accomplished, the more will we desire to feed upon the **“bread which strengthens man’s heart.”**

As in nature, the more we exercise, the better the appetite, so in grace, the more our renewed faculties are called into play, the more we feel the need of feeding, each day, upon Christ. It is one thing to know that we have life in Christ, together with full forgiveness and acceptance before God, and it is quite another to be in habitual communion with Him - feeding upon Him by faith - making Him the exclusive food of our souls. Very many profess to have found pardon and peace in Jesus, who, in reality, are feeding upon a variety of things which have no connection with Him. They feed their minds with the newspapers and the varied frivolous and vapid literature of the day. Will they find Christ there? Is it by such instrumentality that the Holy Ghost ministers Christ to the soul? Are these the pure dew-drops on which the heavenly manna descends for the sustenance of God’s redeemed in the desert? Alas! no; they are the gross materials in which the carnal mind delights. How then can a true Christian live upon such?

We know, by the teaching of God’s Word, that he carries about with him two natures; and it may be asked, which of the two is it that feeds upon the world’s news and the world’s literature? Is it the old or the new? There can be but the one reply.

Well, then, which of the two am I desirous of cherishing? Assuredly my conduct will afford the truest answer to this enquiry. If I sincerely desire to grow in the divine Life - if my one grand object is to be assimilated and devoted to Christ - if I am earnestly breathing after an extension of God's kingdom within, I shall, without doubt, seek continually that character of nourishment which is designed of God to promote my spiritual growth. This is plain. A man's acts are always the truest index of his desires and purposes. Hence, if I find a professing Christian neglecting his Bible, yet finding abundance of time - yea, some of his choicest hours - for the newspaper, I can be at no loss to decide as to the true condition of his soul. I am sure he cannot be spiritual - cannot be feeding upon, living for, or witnessing to, Christ.

If an Israelite neglected to gather, in the freshness of the morning hour, his daily portion of the divinely appointed food, he would speedily have become lacking in strength for his journey. Thus is it with us. We must make Christ the paramount object of our souls' pursuit, else our spiritual life will inevitably decline. We cannot even feed upon feelings and experiences connected with Christ, for they, inasmuch as they are fluctuating, cannot form our spiritual nourishment. It was Christ yesterday, and it must be Christ today, and Christ forever. Moreover, it will not do to feed partly on Christ and partly on other things. As, in the matter of life, it is Christ alone; so, in the matter of living, it must be Christ alone. As we cannot mingle anything with that which imparts life; so neither can we mingle anything with that which sustains it. It is quite true that, in spirit, and by faith, we can, even now, feed upon a risen and gloried Christ, ascended up to Heaven in virtue of accomplished redemption, as prefigured by "**the old corn of the land**" (See Joshua 5).

And not only so, but we know that when God's redeemed shall have entered upon those fields of glory, rest, and immortality, which lie beyond the Jordan, they shall, in actual fact, be done with wilderness food; but they will not be done with Christ. nor with the remembrance of that which constitutes the specific nourishment of their desert life.

*Israel were never to forget, amid the milk and honey of the land of Canaan, that which had sustained them during their forty years' sojourn in the wilderness.*

**"This is the thing which the Lord commandeth, Fill an omer of it to be kept for your generations; that they may see the bread wherewith I have fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you forth from the land of Egypt . . . As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron laid it up before the testimony, to be kept"** (Ver. 32).

Most precious memorial of the faithfulness of God! He did not suffer them to die of hunger, as their foolish hearts had unbelievably anticipated. He rained bread from Heaven for them, fed them with angels' food, watched over them with all the tenderness of a nurse, bore with them, carried them on eagles' wings; and, had they only continued on the proper ground of grace, He would have put them in eternal possession of all the promises made to their fathers. The pot of manna, therefore, containing, as it did, a man's daily portion, and laid up before the Lord, furnishes a volume of truth. There was no worm therein nor ought of taint. It was the record of the Lord's faithfulness, in providing for those whom He had redeemed out of the hand of the enemy.

Not so, however, when man hoarded it up for himself. Then the symptoms of corruptibility soon made their appearance. We cannot, if entering into the truth and reality of our position, hoard up. It is our privilege, day by day, to enter into the preciousness of Christ, as the One who came down from Heaven to give life unto the world. But if any, in forgetfulness of this, should be found hoarding up for tomorrow, that is, laying up truth beyond his present need, instead of turning it to profit in the way of renewing strength it will surely become corrupt. This is a salutary lesson for us.

It is a deeply solemn thing to learn truth; for there is not a principle which we profess to have learnt which we shall not have to prove practically. God will not have us theorists. One often trembles to hear persons make high professions and use expressions of intense devotedness, whether, in prayer or otherwise, lest, when the hour of trial comes, there may not be the needed spiritual power to carry out what the lips have uttered.

There is a great danger of the intellect's outstripping the conscience and the affections. Hence it is that so many seem, at first, to make such rapid progress up to a certain point; but there they stop short and appear to retrograde.

Like an Israelite gathering up more manna than he required for one day's food. He might appear to be accumulating the heavenly food far more diligently than others; yet every particle beyond the day's supply was not only useless, but far worse than useless, inasmuch as it "**bred worms.**"

Thus is it with the Christian.

He must use what he gets. He must feed upon Christ as a matter of actual need, and the need is brought out in actual service. The character and ways of God, the preciousness and beauty of Christ, and the living depths of the Word are only unfolded to faith and need. It is as we use what we receive that more will be given.

*The path of the believer is to be a practical one; and here it is that so many of us come short.*

It will often be found that those who get on most rapidly in theory are the slowest in the practical and experimental elements, because it is work - a work of intellect - than of heart and conscience. We should ever remember that Christianity is not a set of opinions, a system of dogmas, or a number of views. It is pre-eminently a living reality - a personal, practical, powerful thing, telling itself out in all the scenes and circumstances of daily life, shedding its hallowed influence over the entire character and course, and imparting its heavenly tone to every relationship which one may be called in God to fill.

In a word, it is that which flows from being associated and occupied with Christ.

This is Christianity.

There may be clear views, correct notions, sound principles, without any fellowship with Jesus; but an orthodox creed without Christ will prove a cold, barren, dead thing.

Christian reader, see carefully to it that:

- You are not only saved by Christ, but also living on Him.
- Make Him the daily portion of your soul.
- Seek Him “early,” seek Him “only.”

When anything solicits your attention, ask the question, “Will this bring Christ to my heart! Will it unfold Him to my affections or draw me near to His Person?” If not, reject it at once: yes, reject it, though it present itself under the most specious appearance and with the most commanding authority. If your honest purpose be to get on in the divine life, to progress in spirituality, to cultivate personal acquaintance with Christ, then challenge your heart solemnly and faithfully as to this.

Make Christ your habitual food. Go, gather the manna that falls on the dew-drops, and feed upon it with an appetite sharpened by a diligent walk with God through the desert.

May the rich grace of God the Holy Ghost abundantly Strengthen you in all this! \*

**\* My reader will find it profitable to turn to John 6, and prayerfully meditate upon it, in connection with the subject of the manna. The Passover being near, Jesus feeds the multitude, and then takes His departure to a mountain, there to be alone. From thence He comes to the relief of His distressed people, tossed upon the troubled waters. After this He unfolds the doctrine of His Person and work, God declares how He was to give His flesh for the life of the world, and that none could have life save by eating His flesh and drinking His blood. Finally, He speaks of Himself as ascending up where He was before and of the quickening power of the Holy Ghost. It is, indeed, a rich and copious chapter, in which the spiritual reader will find a vast fund of truth for the comfort and edification of his soul.**

*There is one point more in our chapter which we shall notice, namely the instigation of the Sabbath, in its connection with the manna and Israel’s position, as here set forth.*

From Genesis 2 down to the chapter now before us, we find no mention made of this institution. This is remarkable. Abel’s sacrifice, Enoch’s walk with God, Noah’s preaching, Abraham’s call, together with the detailed history of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, are all presented; but there is no allusion to the Sabbath until we find Israel recognized as a people in relationship and consequent responsibility to the Lord. The Sabbath was interrupted in Eden; and here we find it again instituted for Israel in the wilderness.

But alas! man has no heart for God’s rest. And it came to pass that **“There went out some of the people on the seventh day for to gather, and they found none. And the Lord said unto Moses, How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws? See, for that the Lord hath given you the Sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days: abide ye every man in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day”** (Ver. 27-29).



God would have His people enjoying sweet repose with Himself. He would give them rest, food, and refreshment, even in the wilderness. But man's heart is not disposed to rest with God. The people could remember and speak of the time when they "**sat by the flesh pots**" in Egypt; but they could not appreciate the blessedness of sitting in their tents, enjoying with God "**the rest of the holy Sabbath,**" feeding upon the heavenly manna.

*And, be it remarked, that the Sabbath is here presented as a matter of gift. "The Lord hath given you the Sabbath."*

Further on, in this book, we shall find it put in the form of a law, with a curse and a judgment attached to it, in the case of disobedience; but whether fallen man gets a privilege or a law, a blessing or a curse, it is all alike. His nature is bad. He can neither rest with, nor work for, God. If God works and makes a rest for him, he will not keep it; and if God tells him to work, he will not do it. Such is man. He has no heart for God. He can make use of the name of the Sabbath as a something to exalt himself, or as the badge of his own religiousness; but when we turn to Exodus 16, we find that he cannot prize God's Sabbath as a gift; and when we turn to Numbers 15:32-38, we find he cannot keep it as a Law.

*Now, we know that the Sabbath, as well as the manna, was a type.*

In itself, it was a real blessing - a sweet mercy from the hand of a loving and gracious God, who would relieve the toil and travail of a sin stricken earth by the refreshment of one day of rest out of the seven.

Whatever way we look at the institution of the Sabbath, we must see it to be pregnant with richest mercy, whether we view it in reference to man or to the animal creation. And, albeit, that Christians observe the first day of the week - the Lord's day, and attach to it its proper principles, yet is the gracious providence equally observable, nor would any mind at all governed by right feelings, seek, for a moment, to interfere with such a signal mercy.

"**The Sabbath was made for man;**" and although man never has kept it, according to the divine thought about it, that does not detract from the grace which shines in the appointment of it, nor divest it of its deep significancy as a type of that eternal rest which remains for the people of God, or as a shadow of that substance which faith now enjoys in the Person and work of a risen Christ.

Let not the reader, therefore, suppose that in anything which has been, or may be, stated, in these pages, the object is to touch, in the slightest degree, the merciful provision of one day's rest for man and the animal creation, much less to interfere with the distinct place which the Lord's day occupies in the New Testament. Nothing is further from the writer's thoughts.

As a man he values the former, and as a Christian he rejoices in the latter, far too deeply to admit of his penning or uttering a single syllable which would interfere with either the one or the other. He would only ask the reader to weigh, with a dispassionate mind, in the balance of Holy Scripture, every line and every statement, and not form any harsh judgment beforehand.

This subject will come before us again, in our further meditations, if the Lord will. May we learn to value more the rest which our God has provided for us in Christ, and while enjoying Him as our rest, may we feed upon Him as the “**hidden manna**,” laid up, in the power of resurrection, in the inner sanctuary - the record of what God has accomplished, on our behalf, by coming down into this world, in His infinite grace, in order that we might be before Him, according to the perfectness of Christ, and feed on His unsearchable riches for ever.

**~ end of chapter 16 ~**

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