



Manna and Quail

God Provides Blessings

About the Story

The descendants of Jacob (whose name was changed to Israel in Genesis 32) were held in captivity in Egypt for generations, until God heard their cries and sent Moses to lead them into freedom. The Book of Exodus recounts the story of this journey out of slavery.

The first section of the book focuses on the struggle with Pharaoh. Moses and his brother Aaron repeatedly went to Pharaoh to ask for release for the Israelites, but were refused.

God sent a series of plagues on the Egyptians, establishing a pattern whereby Moses demanded release, Pharaoh refused, God sent a plague, Pharaoh relented, the plague was lifted, and then Pharaoh's heart was hardened and the captives remained in slavery. As the plagues worsened, Pharaoh came closer and closer to meeting Moses' (God's) demands.

The final plague established the Jewish holiday of Passover, when the God spared the Israelites but killed all the firstborn of Egypt. The ritual meal of Passover is designed to remember that night, and to celebrate the deliverance God gave the people. Finally, Pharaoh allowed the people to depart. But his heart was hardened one final time, and he sent his armies after them, only to be drowned as the waters of the Red Sea closed after the Israelites passed through unharmed.

Finally, the people of Israel were free. Yet as Moses led them across the wilderness toward the holy mountain where he had first encountered God in a burning bush, the people began to complain. They had been in captivity so long that they no longer knew how to live together in freedom, and they began to long for the familiar life in Egypt. Much of the rest of the Torah (see Bible Nuts & Bolts sidebar) is about how God taught the people to live in freedom, both with one another and with God.

Today's story is one of those lessons. In their lives in Egypt, they had been poorly treated, but they had always known they would be fed. Now, they are on their own, or they think they are. Despite the wonders they have experienced from God, they experience fear that there will not be enough to eat as they cross the desert wasteland. Instead of asking God in faith, they complain that it was better in Egypt. They are becoming slaves again, this time to their fears. Even though they lack faith, God sends the miracle of the bread (manna) and quail to help them learn to trust and to turn their hearts, not to fear, but to God.

The Point:

God sends blessings even when people complain and grumble. The newly-freed people of Israel find themselves in a frightening situation, walking in the wilderness without enough food. They express this fear by complaining, wishing they were back in Egypt. Despite their lack of faith in God's provisions, God gives them exactly what they need, albeit with some consequences for their faithlessness.

Last Week/Next Week

Last week, God blessed Moses with a calling and equipped him for it, in order to fulfill God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In today's lesson, God carries that blessing on to new generations, demonstrating that God provides all that we need, even the basic necessities of life. Next week, God will call a young boy to serve as a prophet, so that God's people will be blessed.

Opening Prayer

Providing God, you have given the world all that is needed to sustain us. Forgive us when we take more than we need, and help us when we feel we do not have enough. Be with us now as we gather to study the stories of your people. Teach us to be good managers of all that we have. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Into the Story

Check in with each other by sharing a story about a time when you felt like you did not have enough of something. How did you feel? How did you respond? Has the situation resolved? If so, how? If not, what is being done about it? What resources would help?

Learning the Story

The Israelites find themselves in the wilderness without enough food. When they complain to Moses, God provides them with both bread and meat to eat, in exactly the right amounts.

Read Exodus 16:1-3 – Complaint in the Wilderness

- ❓ What do you think of the Israelites complaint? Do they have a right to complain? Why or why not?
- ❓ Have you ever felt discouraged after an initial victory? How did you respond?
- ❓ What do you think the Israelites expect Moses and Aaron to do? What do you expect Moses and Aaron to do?

Read Exodus 16:4-8 – Promise in the Wilderness

- ❓ How is God testing the people? Do you expect them to pass? Would you?
- ❓ What tone do you imagine Moses uses when he tell the Israelites what to expect?
- ❓ Is it okay to complain against God? Why or why not?

Read Exodus 16:13-18 – Food in the Wilderness

- ❓ Imagine the reactions in the Israelite camp when food appeared on the ground.

Bible Connections

- ✚ The daily manna continues until the Israelites are settled in the Promised Land (Joshua 5).
- ✚ Jesus feeds a multitude with five loaves and two fish (John 6).
- ✚ The psalmist praises God for many great works (Psalm 78).

- ❓ Why do you think some gathered more and some gathered less?
- ❓ What is the importance of the final verse, that none had any more or less than the others?
- ❓ How have you experienced God providing exactly what you need?

Living the Story: Worship

Work together to create a worship liturgy for sharing food and drink with each other, using elements of the story about manna and quail in the wilderness. Include introductory and closing prayer and a means to distribute the food to each other.

Closing Prayer

Share a snack and a drink around the circle, each person serving the person next to them, and then passing them on. As you serve your neighbor, offer them the following blessing, established by God in the Torah: “The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord’s face shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.” Please be sensitive to possible food allergies.

Supplies

Living the Story

- ✝ Paper
- ✝ Pens or pencils

Closing Prayer

- ✝ A snack to share
- ✝ Plates or napkins
- ✝ A drink
- ✝ Cups

At Home

- ✝ As you eat this week, thank God for each of the people who were involved in providing you this food, from farmer to cook.
- ✝ Take a prayer walk. Find a park, path, or other space in your area where you can walk for 45 minutes or more. As you walk, imagine God is your walking partner, and catch up on things. Share your joys and celebrations, as well as your worries, fears, and complaints.
- ✝ Ask a Jewish friend, local synagogue, or do an Internet search about the festival of Sukkot, which commemorates how God provided for the people during their 40 years of wandering.

Bible Nuts & Bolts: The Torah

The word “Torah” can be translated in several ways, including “law,” “instruction,” or “teaching.” It can be confusing, since the same word is also used to refer to the first five books of the Hebrew Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. While these five books do include the giving and listing of the law, their real function is to teach the people about their relationship with God.

Unfortunately, many people have a negative association with the idea of law, and therefore with the Torah. However, the laws in the Torah, and the Torah itself, are intended to be a guide for responding to God’s promises. Living according to the Torah is not a means to earn God’s grace, but a response to grace that leads to a fulfilling life.

Daily Readings

Sunday—Read Exodus 16:1-18

The Israelites complain to Moses about their lack of food, and God provides them with all they need. What complaints do you have? How can you faithfully bring them to God?

Monday—Read Numbers 21:4-9

The Israelites wander in the desert and now complain that they are sick of manna and miss Egypt again. God sends venomous snakes but saves everyone who looked at a bronze snake on a pole. What can you do instead of complaining?

Tuesday—Read Deuteronomy 5:1-22; 6:1-9

Moses reminds the Israelites of their covenant with God and the statutes that go with it. What are the “house rules” you and your family most value? How do they line up with those in the text?

Wednesday—Read Joshua 1:1-9

After Moses’ death, God taps Joshua as the next leader of the people and tells him to have courage. Write a poem, short story, or journal entry about this day from Joshua’s perspective.

Thursday—Read Joshua 24:2-25

Joshua recounts the history of God’s works on behalf of the Israelites, and the people recommit themselves to their relationship with God. When have you had a broken relationship mended?

Friday—Read Judges 5:1-31

The prophet Deborah unites with the warrior Barak to defeat the Canaanite oppressors. Make a list of the women in your life who have encouraged you and lifted you up.

Saturday—Read 1 Samuel 1:20–2:11

Hannah, who had been childless, dedicates her only son to the Lord and sings a song of praise. Have you ever been able to praise God in the midst of your sorrow? If so, when? If not, can you imagine being able to?