

CHAPTERS 16, 17 & 18

BREAD FROM HEAVEN –

As Exodus 16 opens the Israelites have left Elim – with the 12 wells of water and the 70 palm trees – and have arrived in the Wilderness of Sin. However, we know from Numbers 33:10 that they did not go directly to the Wilderness of Sin, but made a stop about halfway between Elim and there. They “... *encamped by the Red Sea*” for

an undetermined period of time, and then moved on to camp in the Wilderness of Sin as shown on this map.



The difference between the records of Exodus and Numbers isn't an error, by the way. Numbers just provides more details. In fact, it's necessary to reference Numbers as you read Exodus if you want a more complete understanding of all the stops the Israelites made on their way to Canaan. While Exodus does pinpoint certain places they camped, its focus is more on the spiritual aspect of Moses dealing with the people and their understanding of who God wanted them to be. That being said, Exodus 16:1 tells us they came unto the Wilderness of Sin *“on the fifteenth day of the second month after departing out of the land of Egypt.”*

The second month of the Jewish year is the month of Iyar. They left Rameses in 1527 BC on the 15th day of Nisan – which God had declared to henceforth be the first month of the year. Now they've reached the Wilderness of Sin on the 15th day of Iyar of the same year. Calculating “straight-line distance” between each stop they have made – and knowing they certainly didn't go in a straight

line – we can say they’ve traveled at the very least 260 miles. Since we are not told how long they camped at each stop, we can’t know the average distance they walked each day, but we do know they arrived at the Wilderness of Sin in one month.

I should point out that the statement *“camped in the Wilderness of Sinai between Elim and Sinai”* is somewhat misleading. I believe when Moses wrote this, he was referring to the southern end of the Wilderness of Sinai, and not to Mt. Sinai itself, as is the popular view. We know for certain that Moses knew where Mt. Sinai was located because, if you remember, he was taking Jethro’s flock to graze on the edge of the wilderness – in Midian – when he saw the burning bush at the base of Mt. Sinai. If you think about it, the burning bush incident wasn’t so long ago. Almost immediately after the instructions he was given there, Moses and Aaron left for Egypt, confronted Pharaoh Ahmose, and the plagues began. And now, here they are on their way to Canaan.

“Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.”

They are hungry and uncomfortable ...and find themselves “reminiscing about the good ole days” in Egypt when, aside from the fact that they were slaves being worked to death under the lash of Egyptian taskmasters, they *“sat by the pots of meat and ...ate bread to the full.”* Their whining sounds ridiculous to us, but just think about it. Isn’t it true that in our own lives we have at times been guilty of forgetting our true blessings in the face of even minor adversity.

There is, in fact, another lesson in this occurrence if we read it in conjunction with the often overlooked Numbers account: beware of “bandwagons”! Look at what we’re told about the complaining there:

Numbers 11:4 *“Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: “Who will give us meat to eat?” (NKJV)*

Remember how we discussed that a “mixed multitude,” apparently unhappy with the quality of their life in Egypt, accompanied the Israelites in the exodus? They are the ones who started it – this

complaining – but the Israelites hopped on board pretty quickly. According to Numbers 11:1 ***“...it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.”*** The Hebrew word rendered “*complained*” in the KJV is translated “*evil*” in the Septuagint version. So, some of those among the “mixed multitude” were speaking evil things, and it angered the Lord so the ***“fire of the Lord”*** came down and consumed them.

This “fire” could mean one of three things: a fiery bolt of lightning that struck those speaking evil against the Lord, a miraculous outburst of flame similar to the one that slew Nadab and Abihu, or even a miraculous descent of fire from heaven like when Elijah called down the fire that consumed the fifty, in II Kings 1.

Spence, among others, believes the second option – the miraculous outburst of flame – is most likely what really occurred. Whether the fire consumed *only* those in the “mixed multitude” or not, we can’t be sure. We do know it occurred in the “outer parts of the camp”, which is where we could assume the mixed multitude resided. Regardless of whether any Israelites perished along with them, at least some were guilty of complaining along with them. It’s easy to get caught up in this, especially in a workplace environment where there may legitimately be a lot to complain about and it seems to be everyone’s favorite pastime. Nevertheless, we can’t let ourselves fall victim to this bandwagon mentality. Christians aren’t to be complainers (Phil 2:14).

Of course, God hears their cries and ***“rains bread from heaven.”*** The illustration is typical of those found in children’s lesson books, and shows the people gathering large white chunks, like bread, but that isn’t the way it’s described in scripture.



The mysterious white stuff on the ground looked like “fine frost,” or as the KJV says, “hoar frost.” It was as if delicate snowflakes had fallen. They had never seen such a thing and said to one another, ***“It is manna.”***

According to a Greek thesaurus, “manna” means “nourishment” or “sustenance,” but according to Smith’s Hebrew dictionary it is the Hebrew word “**mân**” (pronounced **mawn**) and means a “whatness.” In other words, it is “something they had no name for.”

Ex. 16:4-7 (NKJV) *“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. 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.’ Then Moses and Aaron said to all the children of Israel, ‘At evening you shall know that the Lord has brought you out of the land of Egypt. And in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord; for He hears your complaints against the Lord. But what are we, that you complain against us?’”*

Poor Moses. ***“What are we, that you complain against us?”*** he asks the people, reminding them that he was merely a spokesman for the Lord. We would say, *“Don’t shoot the messenger!”* But the truth was – the complaining that appeared to be directed toward Moses and Aaron – was most definitely against Jehovah, because they knew He was in control. And Moses called them on that. ***“He hears your complaints against the Lord.”***

What does it mean that the Lord will ***“test them, whether they will walk in my law or not”***? It’s about trusting God enough to follow His instructions – all of them – because His wisdom is superior to ours. In this case, they were to only collect enough manna for one day – no more. Then, on the sixth day, enough for two days because none would be provided on the seventh.

Exodus 16:8-13 (NKJV) *“Also Moses said, ‘This shall be seen when the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening, and in the morning bread to the full; for the Lord hears your complaints which you make against Him. And what are we? Your complaints are not against us but against the Lord.’ Then Moses spoke to Aaron, ‘Say to all the congregation of the children of Israel,*

“Come near before the Lord, for He has heard your complaints.” Now it came to pass, as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘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 quail came up at evening and covered the camp, and in the morning the dew lay all around the camp.”

The people would be provided meat each evening and bread each morning – so they would know He is the Lord their God – and that He cares for His own.

Exodus 16:14-17 (NKJV) *“And when the layer of dew lifted, there, on the surface of the wilderness, was a small round substance, as fine as frost on the ground. So when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, ‘What is it?’ For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, ‘This is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat. This is the thing which the Lord has commanded: “Let every man gather it according to each one’s need, one omer for each person, according to the number of persons; let every man take for those who are in his tent.”’ Then the children of Israel did so and gathered, some more, some less.”*

They were to gather an omer for each man *“according to each one’s needs.”* I assume women and children ate less than a man, but likely every family gathered one omer for each person in the family. I have found several descriptions of what an omer amounted to. One said it equals 43.2 average-sized eggs. That would be about 5.5 pounds. Another definition simply said an omer corresponds to about 14 cups. Yet another said it is one-tenth of the dry measure of an ephah, or 2.2 liters (close to 5 lbs). Take your pick. The important thing is, as verse 17 says, the children of Israel gathered it, *“some more, some less.”*

Look at verse 18: *“So when they measured it by omers, he who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack. Every man had gathered according to each one’s need.” (NKJV)* Let’s assume each person had a container they considered to be the size of an “omer,” and they filled it. Since not every container was identical, not every “collection” would be identical

either. But divine intervention took care of that. It turns out that even if they put in too much or too little, it ended up being just right — exactly enough for that individual.

Incidentally, did you notice that the Israelites had no choice but to be early risers? Because ***“when the sun became hot, it melted.”*** And, of course, the instructions included not leaving any leftovers until the next day. Are we surprised to learn that some did not follow instructions: ***“Notwithstanding they did not heed Moses. But some of them left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them”*** It turns out God means what He says, even in what we might consider “the little things.” If that was true in the time of Moses, it is most certainly still true today.

On the sixth day they were told to gather twice as much (2 omers per person) without fear of spoilage. Moses said, ***“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.’ ”*** This is the first mention of an “official” observation of the Sabbath, the way. It is said in the book of Genesis that God rested on the seventh day, but this is the first time this day of rest is used in regard to man.

On the morning of the seventh day, which they were clearly told to honor as a day of rest, there were again some who did not listen. There they were, wandering around outside, eyes to the ground, looking for manna that was not there. This did not go unnoticed by the Lord either. In verse 28 He asks Moses, ***“How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?”*** Moses knew the Lord was instructing him to remind the people – again – of the importance of honoring the Sabbath and said ***“Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.”*** I envision some force behind these words.

Verse 31 tells us this manna which fell from heaven was white, like coriander seed, and tasted like wafers made with honey. These are the only details we are given, however, that doesn’t stop “experts” from speculating as they look for a natural happening to account for a supernatural event.

In 1968 Avinaom Danin, professor of botany at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, noticed white drops on the green stem of a desert plant. He asked a passing Bedouin what it was and the reply was *“It is mann-rimth that you ate when you left Egypt.”* The professor believed the plant to be a common one found in the area and the Bedouin apparently believed the white drops were what had once been called “manna”. The point is, neither of them accepted the notion that this “bread from heaven” had actually been a miracle of the time and not something found in nature. In 2010, David Arnold, writing for the New York Times, also attempted to explain away “manna”, describing it as dried sap from the Tamarisk tree.

Why do men keep trying to take God out of the story of Exodus when He and His relationship with His people are the primary focus of the book?! The Lord our God, whose power is limitless, provided this manna – whatever it was – for the full 40 years His people wandered in the wilderness.

Concerning the manna, the Lord instructed Moses, *“Fill an omer with it, to be kept for your generations, that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.”* And Moses followed His command: *“...so Aaron laid it up before the Testimony, to be kept.”* I don’t believe that the omer of manna ever spoiled, discolored, or in any way changed, so for “generations” after the exodus, it served as a witness or example of how the Lord provided for His children.

Chapter 17:

As Exodus 17 opens, they’re on the move yet again. *“And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the LORD, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink.”* The Exodus description is a “beginning and ending” condensed view. Numbers 33:12-14, however, gives us some “in between’s”: *“And they took their journey out of the wilderness of Sin, and encamped in Dophkah. And they departed from Dophkah, and encamped in Alush. And they removed from Alush, and encamped at Rephidim, where was no water for the people to drink.”* The

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF EXODUS

Ron Roberts

Lesson 11

fact that they “encamped” in each of those three locations indicates they spent at least one night at each of them.

The exact locations of Dophkah, Alush, and Rephidim are often disputed, but again, after looking over a good number of ancient maps of that area, I think the map below shows them reasonably close to the right places. The yellow line highlights the route they could have taken from one to the other.



So why did I include the orange line? This line, which runs from Etham (the Israelites’ second stop) all the way across the middle of the Sinai Peninsula, is one view of the route the Israelites took. It mostly follows the Arabian Trade Route, but turns south at the wilderness of Paran. This was a well

traveled route, and therefore assumed by many to be the way the Israelites went. But it couldn't have been. How do we know that?

If they had gone this way, we would not be reading names like Pi Hahiroth, Marah, Elim, Wilderness of Sin, Dophkah, and Alush. And certainly, we would have to ignore all that we read about the events occurring at Pi Hahiroth (the sea crossing), because it would have happened at Rephidim instead. There is a lot of false information available to us and we cannot just assume that everyone who publishes Biblical information has studied the scriptures.

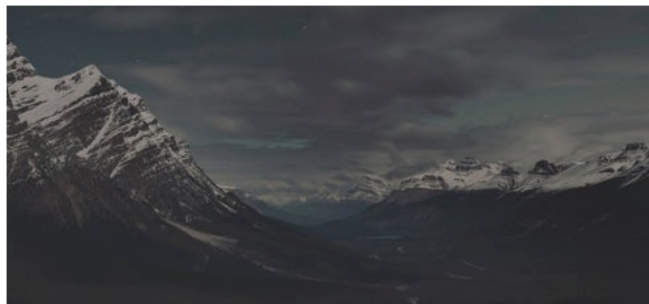


So, let's take a look at the next leg of their journey. The first month's travel was relatively easy, but once they leave the Wilderness of Sin, things are going to get more difficult. From Dophkah to Rephidim, the path is very challenging. They will be traveling over mountainous terrain, through narrow passages, and vigorous elevation changes as the illustration at left

of the Valley of Dophkah, a photo taken by Joseph W. Turner in 1836 shows.

And it doesn't get much better at Alush!

The photo to the right is of the valley just east of Alush, taken by Golan Zocher. Their pace will most certainly be slowed by the terrain. As a matter of fact, some historians believe this area



was traveled in stages, where the people were divided into a number of small groups, and each group left one day later than the one before it. Of course we don't know that from scripture, but I suppose it is possible. I prefer to think they continued like normal, but narrowed their column to fit the space. They still were assembled by tribes... just longer columns.

Using the scale on the map on page 9, it appears that the total distance between the Wilderness of Sin and Rephidim was about 75 to 80 miles, but like we've been saying, they weren't easy miles. But, "it was all downhill" after Alush (literally and figuratively) as they came down to the Gulf of Aqaba and camped in Rephidim.

So, they've struggled over the mountains and through the narrow passes just to get to...a place with no water to drink. This is Rephidim, and unlike Marah where the water was bitter until the Lord sweetened it, here there is no water at all! And of course, the people did not take this in stride by trusting in their Lord to provide for them. ***"So Moses said to them, 'Why do you contend with me? Why do you tempt the Lord?'"(NKJV).***

Moses was as tired and thirsty as they were, and no doubt wondering why God had selected him for this position of "honor" when the stress of dealing with the masses must have been tremendous. He entreated the Lord, ***"What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me!"*** (NKJV). The Lord replied in 17:6: ***"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 in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it that the people may drink."*** (NKJV)

*[NOTE: God isn't speaking of Mt. Horeb as most believe. The actual Hebrew word written in the manuscripts is "**chôrêb**" which simply means "desolate" and was commonly used when referring to the Sinaitic mountains. So the rock is "in this desolate area," not "at Mt. Horeb."]*

This photo is claimed to be the very rock that split when Moses struck it. It is located near Rephidim, and is a popular tourist attraction. The text says Moses named the place "*Massah*" (tempted) ***"because they tempted the Lord, saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not?'"*** With all the wonders He had done for them...we wonder how they could have questioned His presence.



It is here in the valley of Rephidim that the people are called on to fight their first battle and, as Moses is dispatching his soldiers to take on the Amalekites, we first hear the name of Joshua, the son of Nun.

The Amalekites were probably descendants of Amalek – the grandson of Esau, Jacob’s brother. It is thought they separated themselves from other Edomites early on and became the predominant tribe living in the Sinai Peninsula. They claimed to be the sovereign over the whole desert country between the borders of Egypt and Canaan (what later became Palestine). The truth of the matter seems to be that while the Egyptians claimed the Sinai Peninsula as “theirs,” they never physically fought the Amalekites or even patrolled the area on the far east side of the peninsula where the Amalekites lived. However, when that great multitude of Israelites appeared to be settling “in their backyard” – people who were technically their “kinfolk” by the way – the Amalekites attacked, apparently “picking off” the weakest on the outskirts of the group before going for the “core” at Rephidim. We are told in Deuteronomy 25:18: ***“Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you were tired and weary; and he did not fear God.”*** (NKJV)

Does this picture remind you of what happened in this famous story? During the course of the battle, which apparently lasted all of one day, when Moses would raise his hand Israel prevailed, but when he lowered his hand the Amalekites prevailed. So with Aaron and Hur on both sides of Moses, ***“his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.”*** .



According to verse 13, ***“So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.”*** The battle was so decisive, the defeat so convincing, that the Amalekites avoided all contact with the Israelites until just before the taking of Canaan, a little over 40 years later, when they (the Amalekites) joined with the Canaanites to fight off the Israelites... and lost again.

Let's talk a bit about Joshua. His name appears for the first time here in Exodus 17, but his story obviously started long before. The fact that Moses chose him to lead his army suggests that he already had a prominent role and had, in fact, proven himself in some way to be capable of this leadership position. ***“Joshua did what Moses had commanded and fought the army of Amalek.”***

We know he spent the first 20 years of his life in Egypt, where he must have worked beside the other children of Israel as a slave until Moses arrived. The next period of his life is spent wandering through the wilderness with more than a million others. We can assume from what we know of his character that he was doing as he was told during this time, following Moses' lead, obeying all of Jehovah's commands. God spent more than 40 years grooming Joshua. In fact, the picture we're given of him and Moses is one of the better examples of spiritual mentoring in the Bible... and Joshua was an eager student! As we see here, he led those chosen men into battle and with God's help emerged victorious. We also know, of course, that later he will be one of the 12 spies secretly sent into Canaan to scope out the land. Then, ultimately, when Joshua is about 60 years old, Moses will turn the leadership of the children of Israel over to him and he will guide them into Canaan.

In all the Old Testament, was there ever a more “tough act to follow” than Moses! We're talking about the man God selected to deliver Israel from slavery; the one who parted the Red Sea; and the one who talked with God on the mountain! We're told in Exodus 33, ***“The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.”*** There was no ego-driven behavior in Moses' leadership, though. We sensed his humility in his reluctance to even accept his “place in history” back at the burning bush. I suspect Joshua was the same; He was prepared for his role and he accepted it, knowing that he would not face any challenge alone. In fact, as he was “handed the reins,” so to speak, God told him, ***“As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.”*** I doubt there is another character in the Bible who served God with such a varied array of roles throughout his lifetime. As you study the Old Testament, from Exodus through the book of Joshua, you will see him as a servant/leader under Moses, a mighty warrior and army commander, a spy, the leader of Israel, an administrator dividing the land, and an elder passing on his legacy of faith.

When speaking of mortal men, Joshua has been my favorite Bible character from the very first time I heard the story of Jericho! The theme of his life was, ***“Be strong and courageous, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”*** And the statement he made close to the end of his life, has directed my life for the last 65 years: ***“Choose you this day whom ye will serve... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”***

But back to the story at hand: Of course, God worked a miracle that day, giving the victory to Joshua and what we would assume to be untrained and untested Israelite men whom Joshua selected to fight alongside him. God told Moses to record an account of the battle afterwards: ***“Write this down on a scroll as a permanent reminder, and read it aloud to Joshua: I will erase the memory of Amalek from under heaven.”*** (Exodus 17:14)

CHAPTER 18...

“And Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses’ father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people... and [he] came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness, where he was encamped at the mountain of God.” NKJV. Look who’s back! And he has Moses’ wife Zipporah with him. Had you forgotten about her? If you recall, Moses sent her back to Midian after the incident with his uncircumcised sons, when the angel was going to kill him, and Zipporah stepped in and saved him by doing the task herself. Jethro not only has brought Moses’ family to him, he is also going to give him some very pertinent advice in verse 13-17: ***“On the next day, 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? ...The thing that you do is not good. Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out.’”*** (NKJV)



I have added Jethro's home, Mt. Sinai, and the probable route Jethro would have taken (pink line) to go visit Moses, if he had still been at Rephidim. But, was Moses in Rephidim when he was reunited with his family? This is a source of confusion for many, based on some misunderstandings rooted in this chapter, especially verse 5. Here it mentions that Jethro came to Moses ***"...where he encamped at the mount of God."*** Of course, the "mount of God" is Mount Sinai, which we know is located in Midian not far from Jethro's home, and why I made the additions to the map. The confusion comes not just from the assumption that Moses was still in Rephidim, (since up to this point we haven't been told otherwise), but the fact that many believe Mt. Sinai's traditional location – over in the lower part of the Sinai Peninsula. It boils down to a manuscript issue, requiring us to use additional citations from later chapters, as well as in Deuteronomy and Numbers, to figure this out.

For example, Adam Clarke explains that according to Exodus 19:1-2, they didn't arrive at the Mount of God until the third month after leaving Egypt, and we know they were in Rephidim in the second month. So, if they're at the mount of God when Moses and Jethro reunite, some time has passed.

Secondly, Clarke says: *“Moses, in Deut 1:6, 9, 10, 12-15, relates that when they were about to depart from Horeb, which was on the 20th day of the second month of the second year from their leaving Egypt, that he then complained that he was not able to bear the burden alone of the government of a people so numerous; and that it was at that time that he established judges and captains...”* on Jethro’s advice.

The bottom line is that somehow, the manuscripts were miss-numbered or otherwise organized out of place, so when the Septuagint translation was made, Exodus 18 – which speaks of events (Jethro’s arrival) that actually took place 2 years later – was incorrectly dropped in this spot rather than in its correct location to reflect the events in the right time frame. So, even though we weren’t told that they moved on from Rephidim, they obviously did, and in chapter 18 are camped around Mt. Sinai. It makes perfect sense for this to be where Jethro came to visit Moses, since this short trip – with Moses’ family in tow – was much more feasible than the longer trek to Rephidim as the pink line would suggest. Not to mention the fact that the news of all that God had done for Moses would not have had time to teach Jethro’s ears if this reunion had in fact taken place just a little more than a month out of bondage. In those days, it was many months or even years before news traveled from one nation to another.

Even so, Jethro’s advice – remember, he is a priest – was sound: Moses should select ***“able men who fear God, were men of truth and hated covetousness, and place them to be rulers of thousands, hundred, fifties, and tens.”*** And Moses did as Jethro suggested, so from that point on, only the most serious issues reached his ears.

Next stop: Mt. Sinai.