

The Bread *and* Water of Life



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 15:22–16:36, Gen. 3:1–6, Exod. 17:1–7, 1 Cor. 10:4, Exod. 18:1–27, 1 Cor. 10:11.*

Memory Text: “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; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.’ So the people rested on the seventh day” (*Exodus 16:28–30, NKJV*).

After leaving Egypt, Israel was on an unknown journey to the Promised Land. The people faced a demanding and long trek, and they needed to learn a multitude of new lessons. The Lord would lead and care for them; and, yes, He desired to help them grow, but they must learn discipline, self-control, sacrifice, unselfishness, trust in the Lord, and especially obedience.

Moses was a visible leader, and the people had to follow him and his leadership if they were to triumph. It was crucial for them to stay together, to cooperate as a community, and to assist each other. There were many hindrances and challenges ahead. So much of their spiritual growth would depend on how they met those challenges and how they responded to Moses, especially when the challenges became great.

The familiar Chinese saying that “a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step” was true in their situation, and they needed to trust the Lord’s directions with every footstep. Tragically, as we will see, they didn’t learn those lessons so easily.

But then again, who does?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 16.

Bitter Waters

In biblical narratives, different roles are played by different characters, good or bad, and we need to pay close attention to plots, places, timing, and villains. However, the most important point in a storyline is usually the solution and the lessons learned. It's no different in these accounts.

As the episodes show, God is the Problem Solver and the Peacemaker; however, His work is complicated by people's unbelief. As a result of their constant murmuring and disobedience, the Hebrews experienced serious complications, even tragedies. They brought upon themselves many difficulties because of their incredulity and unrepentance.

Read Exodus 15:22–27. After crossing the Red Sea, what was the background to the first miracle performed?

The first test of Israel's faith is associated with the need for water, not surprising given the harsh, hot, and dry desert environment. After three days of traveling, the people finally found water, but it was undrinkable. *Marah* means "bitter," and because the water was bitter, Israel's faith in their caring Lord quickly floundered. However, God reacted with compassion, and the first miracle was performed with a piece of wood. Of course, it was not the wood but the Lord who made the water sweet and drinkable. The people had to learn important lessons: (1) patience in waiting for the Lord's timing, and (2) that God does things in cooperation with humans.

However, the children of Israel took so many things for granted and quickly forgot the great miracles that God had done for them—miracles for which they had just so passionately sung praises to Him, declaring: " 'Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?' " (*Exod. 15:11, ESV*).

And yet, even after their grumbling, God promised that He would not bring upon the Israelites "any of the diseases" (*Exod. 15:26, NIV*) that had plagued the Egyptians. He would protect them. They could experience this promise only on the condition that they stayed faithful to Him.

What trials and struggles have you brought upon yourself? What comfort can you get in knowing that God will still work on your behalf if you cooperate with Him?

Quail and Manna

Unfortunately, there is a repetitive pattern of rebellion in these pilgrimage stories. The people were notoriously forgetful that the mighty hand of God had helped them in the past and that He had provided solutions to their problems. They let their present problems blind them to their ultimate goal and their promised wonderful future. It's a common problem even among God's people today, as well.

Read Exodus 16:1–36. What was the cause of the Israelites' grumbling, and what followed?

It is important to notice that temptations in the Bible are often related to food. In the Garden of Eden, the Fall was related to eating from the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil (*Gen. 2:16, 17; Gen. 3:1–6*). In Jesus' wilderness temptations, Satan's first shot at Him was through food (*Matt. 4:3*). Esau lost his firstborn rights because of his undisciplined appetite (*Gen. 25:29–34*). How often was Israel's disobedience connected to food and drink! No wonder Moses reminded later generations:

“ ‘Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD’ ” (*Deut. 8:3, ESV*).

Manna, of course, was a heavenly bread that God supplied the Israelites with during their 40 years of sojourning in the wilderness. Through this gift, He taught them that He is the Creator and the Provider of everything. Also, God used His supernatural provision of manna to show them how to keep the seventh-day Sabbath.

Each week four miracles happened: (1) for six days, God gave a daily allotment of manna; (2) on Fridays, a double portion of manna was given; (3) the manna did not spoil from Friday to Sabbath; and (4) no manna fell on Sabbath. God was constantly performing these miracles so the people would remember the Sabbath day and celebrate God's goodness on that day. God said: “ ‘Bear in mind that the LORD has given you the Sabbath’ ” (*Exod. 16:29, NIV*).

People like to eat. We were created to like to eat. The rich abundance of food, growing out of the ground (our original diet), reveals not only that God wants us to eat but that we are to like what we eat, too. How, though, can this wonderful gift, that of food (and our liking to eat it), be abused?

Water From the Rock

In the wilderness, you need plenty of water. God took care of this problem, even though the people were quarrelsome, did not trust Him, and even tested His ability and willingness to give them water. In their unbelief, they looked back to Egypt.

Read Exodus 17:1–7. What lesson should the people have learned from this incident?

Moses called the place *Massah*, meaning “testing,” and *Meribah*, which signified “quarreling.” The Lord gave the Israelites water despite their unbelief. These two names should have reminded the Israelites not to test God and not to quarrel with Him (*Heb. 3:7, 8, 15*). They seriously questioned God’s presence among them, although they had already seen much tangible evidence of not only His presence but of His power and His authority.

“Moses smote the rock, but it was the Son of God who, veiled in the cloudy pillar, stood beside Moses, and caused the life-giving water to flow. Not only Moses and the elders, but all the congregation who stood at a distance, beheld the glory of the Lord; but had the cloud been removed, they would have been slain by the terrible brightness of Him who abode therein.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 298.

Water is a symbol of life because without water there is no life. Every cell in our body needs water. We are 60 percent water ourselves. Even our bones are composed partly of water. Thus, providing water in the wilderness for them was a sign for the Israelites that God cared for their needs and that they could trust Him. But, again, they had to obey.

Many centuries later, Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10:4, reminds believers that the experience of the Israelites in the wilderness was unique. Christ Himself not only guided them but provided them with water (*Ps. 78:15, 16*) and met other spiritual and physical needs. Paul proclaimed: “That Rock was Christ.” For them, Christ was the Source of life and the Giver of eternal life. As a rock is solid, so God firmly led His people. One can count on Him because He does not fail to fulfill His promises.

What are some things that, right now, you need to trust God with? How can you learn to submit to His will and wait for Him to act in His time? Why is this not always so easy to do?

Jethro

Moses was visited by Jethro, his father-in-law, who is also called Reuel (*Exod. 2:18*). Jethro brought with him Moses' wife, Zipporah, and two sons, Gershom and Eliezer. When Moses heard that they were coming, he went out to welcome them.

Read Exodus 18:1–27. What major steps in the history of the nation took place here?

Jethro came because he had heard about the astonishing deliverance God had done for Israel. Moses narrated to Jethro in detail “everything the LORD had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel’s sake and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how the LORD had saved them” (*Exod. 18:8, NIV*).

Jethro praised God’s kindness and extraordinary interventions on behalf of His people, declaring,

“ ‘Blessed be the LORD, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh and has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people’ ” (*Exod. 18:10, 11, ESV*).

What we see here is an example of how God’s work among His people was to be a witness to the world of who the true God is and of what He can do for His people.

At the same time that Jethro learned about the true God, he himself had something to offer God’s people: wise and beneficial advice. Moses needed to organize the legal system with just and fair principles. He also needed dedicated and faithful judges, men of integrity. Jethro wisely enumerated the following qualifications: (1) men who fear God; (2) men who are trustworthy; and (3) men who hate dishonest gain. Capable people of good character had to be appointed over different units of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. In this way, Moses’ administrative load would be reduced, and he could focus on significant problems. Thus, the people would be well served.

Moses accepted Jethro’s wise counsel (*Exod. 18:24*) and appointed leaders to different administrative roles (*see also Deut. 1:9–18*).

Moses could have just brushed off the old man and told him to mind his own business. He didn’t. What important lessons can we learn from his willingness to listen to this person who wasn’t even a Hebrew?

The Bread and Water of Life

Read 1 Corinthians 10:11. What reason does Paul give for these events to have been recorded?

Paul explains that all the things that happened to the Israelites are examples and warnings for Christ's followers and will help them avoid the same troubles; that is, they will learn from these examples. This is pertinent instruction for us, we who live at "the end of the ages" (*ESV*). God gives His people the Holy Spirit to strengthen the believers with "power, love and self-discipline" (*2 Tim. 1:7, NIV*) so they can make correct decisions and follow His teaching. Jesus Christ is the Source of new life (*John 14:6*), and only He can turn us into "a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. . . . Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (*Rom. 12:1, 2, ESV*).

Later on, in His ministry, Jesus picked up lessons from these Old Testament accounts, particularly with the manna and the water, using those images to teach truths about Himself, the One who led the Israelites through the wilderness.

Read John 4:7–15 and John 6:31–51. What truths are revealed here for us as Christians?

The Samaritan woman discovered that Christ offers something that she would not get anywhere else. The inner thirst for peace, joy, and happiness comes from God, and thus only God can satisfy it (*Ps. 42:1, 2*).

Later, in the context of the manna, Jesus explained that it was God, not Moses, who provided it for the people. Then Jesus declared: " 'I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger' " (*John 6:35, ESV*). Jesus repeated two times that He is the Bread of Life (*John 6:35, 41, 48*).

As the manna in the wilderness was "bread from heaven" (*John 6:31, 32*), so the water from the rock was Christ's gift to satisfy their thirst. Besides these physical aspects, bread and water also had spiritual significance, for Jesus Christ is "the bread of life" (*John 6:35, 48*) and "the living water" (*John 4:10, 11, 14; John 7:37, 38*). Only in Him, then, can our spiritual thirst and hunger truly be satisfied.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “From the Red Sea to Sinai,” pp. 291–302, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

Not long after the incident with the water, the nation faced a new danger (*see Exod. 17:8–16*)—a fierce and warlike tribe, the Amalekites, attacked them. “The Amalekites were not ignorant of God’s character or of His sovereignty, but instead of fearing before Him, they had set themselves to defy His power. The wonders wrought by Moses before the Egyptians were made a subject of mockery by the people of Amalek, and the fears of surrounding nations were ridiculed. They had taken oath by their gods that they would destroy the Hebrews, so that not one should escape, and they boasted that Israel’s God would be powerless to resist them. They had not been injured or threatened by the Israelites. Their assault was wholly unprovoked. It was to manifest their hatred and defiance of God that they sought to destroy His people. The Amalekites had long been high-handed sinners, and their crimes had cried to God for vengeance, yet His mercy had still called them to repentance; but when the men of Amalek fell upon the wearied and defenseless ranks of Israel, they sealed their nation’s doom.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 300.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Dwell more on the idea of how Jethro learned about the true God from what God did for His people. (*See Exod. 18:8–10.*) Why does that principle hold true today? Ask yourself and your class: What kind of witness does our church present to the world? What do we say to the world about the nature and character of our God?
- ❷ Read again 1 Corinthians 10:4. What should this teach us about the ancient heresy, which some believe today, that says the Old Testament God was vengeful, hateful, and unforgiving, in contrast to what we see in Jesus? How does this verse show why that belief is wrong?
- ❸ Read again what Ellen G. White wrote above about how the Amalekites had the opportunity to learn about the true God. Contrast their attitude to Jethro’s. What lessons can we learn about why God brought judgment upon not just them but upon many of the tribes in the ancient world that Israel came in contact with?

Special Mission: Rehab

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

After surgery to remove three benign tumors, Dmitry Bagal, a Russian missionary living in Germany, was sent for rehabilitation to a vacation resort in Lower Bavaria. There, he found a new mission field where God was working on the hearts of secular and post-Christian people.

One afternoon, Dmitry walked over to a group of people at a Greek restaurant. They called out that the restaurant was closed, and Dmitry responded with a question. “Do you like to read books?” he asked.

Only one man replied. Speaking with a thick Italian accent, he said he preferred to watch movies and had read only one book, the Bible, in his life. Dmitry gave him *The Great Controversy* and explained that it offered a unique perspective on history, especially on the struggle between good and evil. The man read the back cover. “I really want to read this book!” he exclaimed. But he didn’t want the book for free. He gave Dmitry a donation.

Another day, Dmitry paused during a walk to sit beside a stranger on a bench. The two men struck up a conversation. The man said he was a farmer who had no free time, but his threshing machine had broken, and he was waiting for it to be repaired. “Do you like to read books?” Dmitry asked.

The man conceded that he didn’t like to read but said his wife did. Dmitry gave him a *Great Controversy* for his wife. The man read the back cover and declared that he had changed his mind. He wanted to read the book.

Resuming his walk, Dmitry passed a car with a bumper sticker that read, “God does miracles in Germany.” Wanting to meet the car’s owner, he rang the doorbell of the house in front of the car. On the door, he saw a sign that read, “Honey from our own beehives.” When a woman opened the door, he asked about the honey. The two talked about honey for a few minutes and then about faith. The woman said Jesus had miraculously healed her of an illness. Dmitry bought a jar of honey and offered her the choice of a book as a gift: *The Desire of Ages* or *The Great Controversy*. She chose *The Desire of Ages*. Thanking Dmitry, she gave him a second jar of honey as a gift. Dmitry thanked her by giving her the other book, *The Great Controversy*. Both were incredibly happy with their meeting.



During his month in rehab, Dmitry distributed nearly 50 copies of *The Great Controversy* and changed the focus of his mission work in Germany. “Because I enjoy sharing books so much, I’m preparing to become a literature evangelist,” he said.

This Inside Story illustrates Mission Objective No. 2 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “I Will Go” strategic plan: “To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach . . . among unreached and under-reached people groups, and to non-Christian religions.” Read more at IWillGo.org.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Exodus 16:28–30*

Study Focus: *Exod. 15:22–18:27*

Introduction: God’s miraculous intervention to rescue His people from bondage, an unprecedented and unrepeatable event, was to be remembered, and regularly commemorated, in the Passover. The Israelites were redeemed and free to go, but freedom is a costly commodity. God’s signs and wonders were performed on Israel’s behalf, resulting in divine judgments falling upon Egypt. These judgments were not merely punitive for the Egyptians but were instructive for the Israelites as well, helping them to know the true God and what the real, lasting values were in life. God presented Himself as a loving and just Redeemer, a mighty Warrior who had rescued Israel from slavery. These dramatic events were designed to lead His people to fully trust Him as their wise Guide and Caregiver and thus to depend upon His leadership.

After the great deliverance from Egypt, the Red Sea experience, and the splendid celebration of God’s salvation from the hands of Pharaoh and his army, God led Israel to the Desert of Shur, where they traveled for three days without finding water. Here the Israelites were presented with another test of trusting the Lord (*Exod. 15:25*). Just prior to this test, the Israelites trusted the Lord after crossing the Red Sea and seeing the defeat of Pharaoh (*Exod. 14:31*). Would they continue to stay on the path of implicit trust in God, with a confident attitude in their Leader? All that had happened in the past days and weeks should have been etched into their memories. Would they remember God’s leadership when the hardships of life struck again?

God cared for Israel like a loving parent, and He led them patiently through the desert. He had to teach them painful lessons when they murmured; yet, He lovingly provided water, quail, and manna and instructed them on how to keep the Sabbath holy.

Part II: Commentary

Exodus 15:22–18:27 describes Israel’s journey to Sinai. The passage contains five narratives: two stories are related to the gift of water. The first water narrative, at Mara, concerns making bitter water sweet (*Exod. 15:22–27*). The second water narrative concerns water springing from a rock (*Exod. 17:1–7*). In between these two stories lies miraculous gifts of

food—quail and manna—and teachings about how to keep the Sabbath (*Exod. 16:1–36*). These three wonders—water, quail, and manna—are followed by two additional accounts, namely, the Lord’s gift of victory over the Amalekites (*Exod. 17:8–16*) and Jethro’s visit, during which time he gives wise advice to Moses (*Exod. 18:1–27*).

The Gift of Water at Mara

For the first time in the book of Exodus, the Hebrew root *lun*—“murmur,” “grumble,” “complain”—appears in our story about the lack of potable water in the Desert of Shur. The Israelites stopped at Mara, where the water was bitter; so, the “people grumbled against Moses” (*Exod. 15:24, NIV*). Unfortunately, *lun* became a key expression that marks Israel’s stories of wandering through the wilderness. It is a dominant word in the stories of manna and quail, where this negative term occurs eight times (as a verb in Exodus 16:2, 7, and 8; as a noun in Exodus 16:7, 8; and twice more in verses 9 and 12). It also is mentioned in the next account regarding water springing from the rock in the Rephidim narrative (*Exod. 17:3–6*). The same idea of murmuring or grumbling occurs in the book of Numbers (*Num. 14:2, 27, 29, 36; Num. 16:11, 41; Num. 17:5, 10*). This term is used outside of the Pentateuch only in Joshua 9:18.

When the people complained, Moses cried out to the Lord, which is now mentioned for the third time in Exodus (*Exod. 8:12, Exod. 14:15, Exod. 15:25*). The Lord directed Moses to throw into the bitter water a piece of wood. Thus, the water was healed when Moses followed God’s instructions. In the context of the water’s healing, the Lord promises that He will not bring upon them “‘any of the diseases [Hebrew: *mackalah*]’ ” He “ ‘brought on the Egyptians,’ ” if they will carefully listen and obey Him. To secure His promise, He uses a divine formula: “ ‘I am the LORD who heals you’ ” (*Exod. 15:26, NKJV*). The Lord refers to the various illnesses in connection with the ten plagues (see also God’s promise in *Exod. 23:25*). No such plague will fall on the faithful.

In the wilderness, water is a life-giving product. Without water, one cannot live; it is a source and sustainer of life. Water is life. One can survive without it for only a few days. No wonder we have several important stories and miracles related to water in Exodus and Numbers. Afterward, Israel encamped in Elim, where there was plenty of water and shade from the palms.

Quail, the Gift of Manna, and the Sabbath

The Lord mercifully responded to the grumbling of the people, who complained that they did not have meat and other food that they had enjoyed in Egypt. Their speech is full of exaggerations and bitter irony. The Israelites

recalled their full plates while slaving for Pharaoh. In response, however, the Lord promised that He would provide them with bread from heaven as well as quail. He said that in the evening they would have quail and in the morning bread from heaven. It happened precisely as predicted (*Exod. 16:13*). The surprise was in the morning, because they had never seen manna before, so they asked, “What is it?” (*Exod. 16:15*). This question is the meaning of the word “manna.”

With the gift of manna, God taught the Israelites how to observe and live the Sabbath. Jesus calls manna the “bread from heaven” (*John 6:31*), which is a reference to Exodus 16:4. Thus, manna was the bread the Lord gave His people to eat in the desert (*Exod. 16:15*). For 40 years, manna was provided for the Israelites (*Exod. 16:35*). The provision of manna ceased only when the Israelites celebrated their first Passover in the Promised Land (*Josh. 5:10–12*).

Every week during the Israelites’ 40-year sojourn in the wilderness, four miracles occurred. These miracles taught the Israelites the sacredness of the Sabbath: (1) manna fell from heaven every day, except on Sabbath; (2) if someone collected manna for the next day during the workweek, the manna was spoiled by the following day; (3) manna fell in a double portion every Friday, the Sabbath’s preparation day; and (4) manna collected on Fridays did not spoil but stayed fresh for consumption on Sabbath. Thus, the Lord provided every day for Israel’s needs. Six days per week they needed to go out and collect manna, a reminder that every day they were completely dependent upon Him.

Another miracle with the bread from heaven was the Lord’s command to Moses to take an *omer* of manna, about 3.64 liters, put it into a jar, and then place it in front of the Testimony (*Exod. 16:34*). Later, the *omer* of manna was put into the ark of the covenant (*Heb. 9:4*) as a reminder to future generations. This manna did not spoil, even though the longest length for its staying unspoiled was only two days, from Friday to Sabbath.

The noun “Sabbath” (Hebrew: *shabbat*) several times is highlighted in the book of Exodus and mentioned for the first time in the Bible in Exodus 16:23, in which it is described as a “Sabbath rest” (Hebrew: *shabbaton*) and a “holy Sabbath to the LORD.” This verse is the first explicit command regarding Sabbath observance and contains three imperatives: “bake,” “boil,” and “lay aside” (*ESV*)! Sabbath should be celebrated. It is interesting that verse 25 adds the fourth imperative: “Eat”! Eat the manna today. Eating is closely tied to the observation of the Sabbath. The temporal term “today” is used three times in this text in connection with the Sabbath, thus emphasizing the miracle of eating manna on Sabbath because God provided it. In verse 25, it is stated that this is a “Sabbath to the LORD” (*NIV*), and verse 26 explains that the Sabbath is the seventh

day of the week. Verse 30 connects Sabbath to rest: “So the people rested [Hebrew: *shabat*] on the seventh day.” The triad of key words in this passage of Exodus 16:23–30—namely, “Sabbath,” “today,” and “rest”—ties in with Hebrews 4:7–10, in which Paul also elaborates on the ideas of “Sabbath,” “today,” and “rest.” The word “Sabbath” appears in the book of Exodus also in the following texts: in Exodus 16:25, 26, 29; Exodus 20:8, 10, 11; Exodus 31:14, 15 (twice), 16; and Exodus 35:2, 3.

In the apex of the manna story, when some people went out on Sabbath to gather manna, God asked a very pointed question:

“ ‘How long will you refuse to keep my commands’ ” (*Exod. 16:28, NIV*). The Lord uses the word “refuse” to describe their willful action. They needed to learn that the Sabbath was a gift, one that is reinforced by the fact that the Lord provided the food for them. Therefore, they did not need to collect manna for themselves on Sabbath.

Part III: Life Application

1. **Jesus proclaimed about Himself that He is the Bread of Life (*John 6:35, 48*). How can we live with Jesus Christ in such a close relationship that He becomes for us our daily “bread and water”?**

2. **When, and how, should we attend to those who complain about the difficulties of life, and when should we not listen to murmuring?**

3. **God was present in the pillar of cloud and in the pillar of fire, but the Israelites took His presence in the cloud for granted. We also**

may have an outstanding work of God taking place among us and not appreciate it. How can we maintain our sense of awe for the sacredness of things related to God and His work?

4. Jethro's visit is a narrative par excellence about godly leadership. Moses was learning and growing in his leadership skills. He was a God-centered leader who acknowledged God's leadership in his life and for Israel. Moses also was an exceptional listener, who was filled with gratitude and praises for God. He was a visionary; yet, he needed to learn how to delegate responsibility. He was teachable even though he was a strong leader. What was it about Moses that enabled him to be open to new ideas and areas of improvement without taking constructive criticism personally or being threatened by suggestions for growth?

5. The apostle Paul, in reference to the miracle of the water flowing from the rock at Rephidim, states that Jesus was the Rock (*1 Cor. 10:4*). In that narrative, the people grumbled and put the Lord to the test (*Exod. 17:2*). In Malachi 3:10, we are invited to test God. What is the difference between the positive and negative testing of God? How can we test God in a wrong way?
