

The Manna from Heaven Is Christ, Your Daily Bread



by LAUREN WHITMAN

When I was in high school I bought a resource called *The Dictionary of Symbols*. As I read books for English classes and wrote papers about them, I loved going to this dictionary to search for deeper meanings to names, objects and images. In college, I majored in English and continued to enjoy exploring works of literature and interpreting their meaning and significance. When I became a Christian, I learned that God is the master of deeper meanings. The Bible is a beautifully crafted story filled with evocative and enduring metaphors and symbols. And though we can discover a lot about life from other literature, the Bible tells a story that is uniquely rich because it is God's chosen way of revealing himself. The story he tells about himself is also a story about us. He is not just *the* Creator and Redeemer. He is *my* Creator and Redeemer. He is *your* Creator and Redeemer.

One way God reveals himself is by giving new meanings to everyday things. For example, he describes himself as light, as water, and as a vine. Because of our familiarity with these, it helps us better grasp who God is and what he is like. Another common image that God uses has to do with food—manna, the daily bread in the desert. Both the literal and figurative uses of manna in Scripture work to prepare us to receive a life-altering truth about who God is, about who we are, and about what we need. Jesus as-

Lauren Whitman (MA) is a counselor at CCEF and assistant editor for the Journal of Biblical Counseling.

toundingly proclaims in John 6 that he is the bread of life. He is manna. When he later institutes the Lord's Supper and tells us to eat of his body, it has become crystal clear what God wants us to know about the nature of our spiritual hunger and our dependency. He is the only food that truly satisfies and sustains life.

To help you gain a picture of this, I will trace the theme of manna throughout the Bible so you can see how Scripture develops it. Then I will describe how manna is relevant to daily life. I will illustrate how these truths can be applied to common struggles that pastors and counselors encounter when people come for help and guidance. Finally, I'll show how understanding Christ as our manna enlarges the meaning of several everyday Christian practices and beliefs. For all my readers, I hope it will bless you to reflect on manna and how it can be relevant in your life. We can feed on him in our hearts as often as we need to, as often as we eat actual food—and even more often than that. We do this because we need the bread of life today. We need Christ every day.

Let's now turn to where we first find manna—in the Old Testament.

God's Care in the Desert

To fully grasp how Christ is the true manna, we'll start in the Old Testament where manna first appears. We'll consider three matters:

- the historical context in which God first gave manna,
- how God interpreted the meaning of manna,
- and how Israel continued to remember the manna after the original event.

The original event. The people of Israel were miraculously delivered out of slavery in Egypt, and began their journey to Canaan through the desert. Almost immediately they begin to grumble and complain against God because of the hardships of trudging through the wilderness. They bring charges against their God-appointed leaders, Moses and Aaron: “You have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death” (Ex 16:3).

Think about that charge. Through many signs and wonders in Egypt, God had demonstrated not only his power, but also his care for the Israelites. They had been enslaved in Egypt, with no hope of freedom. But God intervened on their behalf. Now, they are accusing Moses and Aaron

of attempted murder (which is really an accusation against God as Moses points out in Exodus 16:8). It is fair to say that this is both an ungrateful charge and one that fails to consider the facts of the recent events that they witnessed firsthand. The only thing more surprising than their charge is the response God gives. His immediate response is filled with mercy.

Jesus astoundingly proclaims in John 6 that he is the bread of life. He is manna.

God meets with Moses and tells him that he has heard the people's grumblings. Though they have sinned against him by grumbling, he is not a God who will abandon his people to perish in the desert. Instead, he shares his plan for how he will provide food. He will give quail that evening and he will rain down manna from heaven the next morning. Manna is described as a fine, flake-like substance. It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey (Ex 16:14, 31). God promises to send manna each day, as well as provide a double serving on the day before the Sabbath so that they do not have to work that day.

This gracious promise reveals who God is. He hears them. He listens. He provides for them. He is with them. Indeed, this miraculous feeding indicates God's very presence with his people. He is trekking with them through the desert. He always knows their whereabouts. He always rains the manna to the very spot where they are located. Over the course of forty years, he stayed with them. Day in and day out. He never lost sight of them. He never failed to feed them. They made it to the Promised Land. The manna is such a significant sign that the Israelites had to preserve the memory of it. They were instructed by God to place it in a pot in the Ark of the Covenant so future generations would know about what he had done.¹

How God interprets the significance of manna. God sent the manna to feed the Israelites, but it had a greater significance than that. God says the

¹ The Ark of the Covenant is the place where God would meet with Moses and speak his commandments for his people (Exodus 25:22). The manna was kept there (along with the tablets of the covenant law and Aaron's budded staff) as a reminder of how God had provided for his people in the wilderness (Exodus 16:32).

*To continue reading this article, visit ccef.org/jbc
to purchase the individual journal issue or
subscribe to the Journal of Biblical Counseling.*

The Journal of Biblical Counseling
(ISSN: 1063-2166) is published by:

Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation

1803 East Willow Grove Avenue
Glenside, PA 19038

www.ccef.org

Copyright © 2016 CCEF