

Message #29

Exodus 16:1-21

You know one of the famous psychologists who used to be held in high esteem at Western Michigan University is B. F. Skinner. B. F. Skinner was the Harvard professor who became famous for his system of psychology which said we can influence behavior by our responses or reinforcements to the behavior. So if we give positive reinforcement to specific behavior, we can control the behavior so that he will respond in a positive way. If we give a negative reinforcement to behavior, we can actually prevent negative behavior from occurring because the subject will realize if I behave in a negative way there will be negative repercussions. Skinner believed we could create perfect positive behavior by creating a perfect positive environment.

Well, I took a course in psychology in college from one of these Skinnerian PhD's and we got into an interesting discussion about the book of Genesis. I challenged him to explain the Garden of Eden where the environment was perfect. Adam and Eve had the perfect environment and it did not produce perfect behavior. He never did answer the question. To my amazement I actually got a good grade from this professor.

Now, this is a very interesting passage that lies before us because frankly, Israel's behavior is bad. Israel's behavior stinks. But God graciously provides and cares for her in spite of her bad behavior.

The children of Israel started manifesting some bad forms of behavior soon after she had been delivered. Very early in her national redemptive history she started grumbling against Moses and God. Their first national grumbling episode had to do with bitter water at Marah. They started grumbling there rather than praying, and God, in His amazing grace, provided water for them.

That seemed to quiet them down for a few days. Then they moved to an area known as Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and they camped there and they seemed to be happy. They had plenty of water and the nation was no longer grumbling. Everything seemed to be going along fine and the murmuring stopped. But that was short-lived. It didn't take long until Israel returned to her old ways. She, to this day, still has not learned that she can cry out to God for salvation. She refuses to cry out to Jesus Christ as her Savior. She would rather mumble and grumble rather than cry out to God in spite of all she has seen God do. What we see here is that:

IN SPITE OF THE GRACE OF GOD IN SAVING AND CARING FOR HIS PEOPLE, HIS PEOPLE GRUMBLED AND SAID HORRIBLE THINGS THAT EVENTUALLY PROMPTED GOD TO PUNISH HIS OWN PEOPLE.

What makes this passage so troubling is that it is so applicable to us. Paul specifically quotes this episode in making an application to those of us who are Grace Age believers (I Cor. 10:1-12). If we could just read this text and say, "Boy, Israel is all messed up," that would be one thing; but the truth is we are potentially just as messed up as she was.

We see God do something wonderful and it doesn't take long until we are right back in the same boat of doubting or struggling. We are just like Israel. Years ago when I was in sales, by God's grace I landed a big account, the Walden Book Store account.

Literally I had prayed many times that God would let us get that account and God answered the prayer. It was a major account. It put Kregel Publications in nearly 1000 stores. The book we got in there retailed for about \$15. Now you can do the math. Sell one 15 dollar book a month in 1000 stores and you are talking about a sizeable annual account.

Well, after landing that account you would have thought I would have never doubted sales again. Well, that didn't last long. Because shortly after that I was worrying about landing the B. Dalton account. We are just like Israel.

Let us put this in our world in 2014. Has not God provided for us to this point in our lives? Has not God blessed us in many ways? Now let's suppose for hypothetical purposes that we get a crazy President who comes up with some weird healthcare system. Do you think God will stop caring for us? Don't we find ourselves murmuring like Israel? That is exactly what she did.

There are ten historical facts we want you to see:

HISTORICAL FACT #1 – Israel is in the wilderness of Sin on the 15th day of the second month. **16:1**

Numbers 33:10-12 inform us that the nation traveled and camped by the east side of the Red Sea and went into the wilderness of Sin. Now according to Numbers 33:3, Israel began moving away from Egypt at Rameses on the 15th day of the “first” month.

Notice carefully that **verse 1** says that it is now the 15th day of the “second” month. Moses informs us that exactly one month had passed since they had departed from the land of Egypt.

Tremendous things have happened in one month. These should have been exciting times of great trust in God. God called this nation out of Egypt, He saved them, He provided water for them and He will provide food for them.

HISTORICAL FACT #2 – Israel grumbles against Moses and Aaron. **16:2-3**

It is a terrible sin to complain about God and all God is doing. This time they are not grumbling about water, they are grumbling about food. Probably the people and livestock were losing some weight and instead of going to God, they again started grumbling.

Do you see the early pattern here? What they should do is realize we have a God looking out for us and we can go to Him and ask Him for our needs. He gave us water when we needed it, we can trust Him to give food when we need it. But instead they start grumbling. Their perspective is that God is not doing them any good.

There is nothing wrong with wanting enough food to eat. You need fuel to travel, but instead of going to God, who parted the Red Sea and who just turned bitter water into sweet water some 27 days earlier, they started grumbling and blaming Moses and Aaron.

Now they actually said in **verse 3** we wish we would have died in the Egypt where we had plenty to eat rather than come out here with you to be killed in this wilderness by starving. They forgot that they had been slaves. These Israelites forgot the slavery, they forgot the forced labor, they forgot the beatings and the killings; but they remembered boiling pots of food.

Instead of thinking about running away from their hunger problems back to Egypt and instead of complaining, they should have said Moses, go to God for us and get us some food.

Actually what Israel doesn't know at this point is that they are in some ways speaking prophetically. Most of them will die by the Lord's hand but will die in the wilderness, not in Egypt.

HISTORICAL FACT #3 – God says he will provide Israel with food and a test. **16:4-5**

The text states that “then” after their grumbings. God was obviously listening into all of this grumbling and He came to Moses and said He was going to rain bread from heaven for them, but He was also going to provide them with a little test to see if they truly trusted Him and would walk according to His “instruction” or “law.” **God will, at times, put us into various situations to see whether or not we will obey His instruction.**

Is this not a beautiful picture of the grace of God? God does not give Israel what she deserves. She is grumbling about God and what she deserves to have God do is to not provide anything for her. Instead, God makes a marvelous provision.

By having this bread come from heaven they would learn what they should have already known and that is God is the One who provides for us and cares for us. They would be forced to realize this by the “bread from heaven.”

The test would be that God would rain bread for them to eat every day, and they were to go out and get what they needed for each day. However, on the sixth day they were to take twice as much as they would take every other day, because it needed to be enough to cover the seventh day.

God would do this to see whether or not Israel would obey His “instruction,” literally His torah or law. So this test is to determine whether or not you will obey God's Word.

This test had two features to it—1) Take what you need every day; 2) Take twice what you need on one day. If you took too much any day but one day, it would spoil. But on the sixth day you could take double and it would not spoil.

Now what would this lesson teach Israel? She needs to depend on the Word of God and trust the Word of God every single day.

HISTORICAL FACT #4 – Moses reveals to Israel the seriousness of their grumbling.
16:6-8

Now the first thing Moses does is he reminded Israel that God had brought them out of Egypt. Now this point is a critical point. The same God that just brought you out of the land of Egypt is with you now. The same God who just saved you has not abandoned you.

He told them that they would see the glory of God in the way He would provide for them. By seeing the glory of the Lord, she would know that God hears and knows about the grumbling. The truth is their grumbling is a grumbling against God (**16:8**).

One problem Israel has always had and a problem we tend to have as well is that we do not focus on the glory of God; we always focus on the needs of self and that causes us to grumble. Instead of her focusing on the greatness of the glory of God who saves, she was focused on the appetites of herself. This is what caused the grumbling; she lost sight of the Glory of God.

Then he gave them a strong lecture about their grumbling:

- 1) God hears grumbling. God hears everything all the time and what this means is He is closely paying attention to it and will do something about it.
- 2) God hears grumbling against Him.
- 3) God hears grumbling against His leaders.
- 4) God classifies grumbling as grumbling against Him.

Now in **verse 8** Moses said God is going to give you meat to eat in the evening and bread to eat in the morning and all of you need to realize that your grumbling is against Him.

It is clear from Scripture that we do not want God to classify us as a habitual murmurer or grumbler or complainer.

HISTORICAL FACT #5 – Moses tells Aaron to speak to the entire congregation. **16:9-10**

Now it appears to me that the essence of Aaron's lecture to the congregation is a rebuke against their grumbling. Murmuring and grumbling are serious things. God wants His people thankful.

Message #1 - Gather together because God has heard your grumbings. **16:9**

God's people need to remember this fact: whenever we complain about what God has or has not given to us, He hears it. He is aware of it. When we complain against God's world, He hears it. This point is stressed multiple times in this context. God listens in to our conversations. Our words can and will condemn us.

Message #2 - As Aaron spoke, the glory of the LORD visibly appeared in the cloud. **16:10**

Apparently this was a very unusual demonstration of the presence of God other than the pillar of a cloud in the day time and a pillar of fire in the night.

This was some impressive and awesome display of the Divine presence of God. This display should have left Israel worshipping God, not murmuring against God. What this tells us is this grumbling business is serious before God because it has to do with speaking against the presence of God.

HISTORICAL FACT #6 – God speaks to Moses and reveals what He will do. **16:11-12**

Again it is brought out that God hears the grumbling. Again we see the grace of God. God is graciously going to give Israel what she does not deserve. God was going to graciously provide for His people even though instead of praying to Him they grumbled about Him.

Provision #1 - God would abundantly provide meat at night. **16:12a**

Provision #2 - God would abundantly provide bread in the morning. **16:12b**

The provisions and blessings of God would be new every day. The provisions would be “filling” (v. 12). In other words, you won’t be filled until you eat but when you do eat you will be completely filled. Everyone would have enough calories to completely fill them up.

HISTORICAL FACT #7 – God provided the food just as He promised. **16:13-14**

God again demonstrated grace—in the evening the quails came up and covered the camp so they had food and in the morning there was this “fine flake-like” piece of bread.

Now the meat came from an animal and because there was no means of refrigeration, it was killed and cooked and eaten the same day. Now so many quail showed up that apparently you could catch them by hand. Typically you need a good dog and shotgun to hunt quail, but this is a supernatural provision of God.

According to Numbers 11:9 the dew fell on the ground at night; God sent the manna every morning. Once the dew evaporated the Israelites saw something on the ground of the wilderness that resembled a flake.

HISTORICAL FACT #8 – Israel is instructed concerning what the bread was and how they were to gather it. **16:15-19**

When the children of Israel saw this bread they wondered what it was. There are some who suggest that there is a similar flake that is produced by the tamarisk tree. But no Israelite had ever seen this so this is a special miracle of God in providing this food.

The Psalmist called it “angel’s food.” They had never seen anything like it. Moses said this is the bread God has given you to eat. Here are the stipulations:

Stipulation #1 - Each man is to gather as much as he should eat every day. **16:16a**

Each man was to gather a certain amount based on the number of people staying in his tent.

Stipulation #2 - Each man shall take an omer for each person who stayed in his tent. **16:16b**

You could not just “pig out” on the manna. God prescribed the amount needed for each person. An “omer” is equal to about 2 quarts. Now small children would not eat quite as much, but God had all of that figured out. If you gathered an omer for each person, it would be enough to feed the right amount to the children and the adults.

According to **verses 17-18**, each person gathered the amount they needed. There was enough there for those who needed a lot and those who needed a little. If you measured it right, it came out right. If you purposed to obey the Word of God, it would always come out right.

Stipulation #3 - No amount is to be left until morning. **16:19**

Every day the new collection of manna was to be completely eaten. Take what you need each day and enough will be there the next day. That prayer “give us this day our daily bread” is a prayer Israel still has not learned to pray.

HISTORICAL FACT #9 – Israel did not listen to Moses. **16:20**

Israel did not listen to Moses nor obey the Word of God. In any group there will be those who take God’s Word seriously and those who don’t. But we may be certain of one thing—not taking God’s Word seriously will never lead to positive results. Any extra that was kept and not eaten was filled with maggots and worms and stank.

Moses would get angry because they would not obey God. Moses had been given the Word of God and he taught it accurately to the people and the people would not listen. It made him mad.

HISTORICAL FACT #10 – God still provided for Israel. **16:21**

God’s grace is again seen in this verse. God was faithful and true to His Word even though His people were not obeying Him.

Now Jesus specifically uses this very text in reference to Himself (John 6:26-51; 30-33, 35). He is the bread of heaven. He is the One who sustains life.