

Where the Lord Leads, Blessings Follow

Exodus 16:13-30

According to Scripture and traditional chronology, Israel was in the wilderness of Sin on the fifteenth day of Ziv in 1446 BC (Exodus 16:1). That's springtime, the end of April or beginning of May, a more pleasant time of year for this region. The wilderness of Sin sound ominous but it's not talking about sin as we understand it. The name may come from a moon god worshipped by inhabitants of the area, such as the Midianites further to the East, who were known for placing crescent-moon shaped pendants on their camels (Judges 8). They were moving out into new territory.

Progress through the wilderness was slow. Think about it: the Israelites are changing from being a settled people who lived in a river delta in Egypt to being a nomadic people like their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob 400 years earlier. Imagine the difficulty of leaving behind the conveniences of life as you know it today to pursue the lifestyle of your ancestors 400 years earlier and you can begin to understand how the Israelites felt: sore-footed, achy from toting their gear, headed somewhere few of them had been before.

[Antiphon:] But where the Lord leads, **blessings follow**.

When we see pictures of the Sinai Peninsula today, they give us a wrong impression of the region as Israel experienced it. Today Sinai is bony rock, sand, and dust—a desert. But when Moses led Israel to Sinai, there was more rainfall. Archaeologists know this from studying pollen they discover while digging in the region, which shows there was a lot more plant life.

Also remember that the Israelites were herdsmen in Egypt. They took care of the flocks and cattle, which was work that the Egyptians didn't want to do. With more annual rainfall, the Sinai was well prepared to receive these shepherds and support them. But Israel didn't always know how to find the water and pasture they needed. So they needed to learn that:

[Antiphon:] Where the Lord leads, **blessings follow**.

On a trip like this, the Israelites might have complained about anything but Moses tells us they felt hardship first in their feet and in their bellies. They said:

Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, where we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full (Exodus 16:3).

You can just hear it: get me off my feet and at the dinner table. And these are people after my own heart. They're not yet complaining about the lack of vegetables, though they would do so later. No, the first things they miss are meat and bread. These were people used to abundance who, despite the slavery and oppression in Egypt, could eat to the full. But now times were growing leaner. They had not yet learned:

[Antiphon:] Where the Lord leads, **blessings follow**.

So the Lord in His kindness rains down upon them life sustaining food: quail, migrating out of central Africa as they do each spring, descended upon the camp. These quail sometimes grow so tired from flying that when they land to rest, you can just pick them and cook them. And as if the quail were not

enough, there descends upon the wilderness a refreshing dew each morning. The hot dry air soaks up water from the sea and the cool air over night rains the water down upon the land. But Israel receives not just the dew but with it something they have never seen before: the bread of heaven, manna.

The name manna literally means, “What is it?” That what the Israelites said when they saw it! There is in this region something called tamarisk manna that drips from the tamarisk trees in June and July and may be eaten. But the manna Moses describes is quite different. It comes with the dew. It comes six days a week all year long. It’s not just tree sap but something to bake and to boil. And so the Lord blesses His people with meat and bread sustaining them in the journey, for

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But with the manna Israel receives something more, something they were only beginning to understand: the teaching of the Lord called His “Law” or “torah.” On the one hand it is rules for how they should live, His commandments. But on the other hand, it is God’s wisdom and teaching about the blessings He has for us in life. The Lord uses the gift of the manna to teach Israel how to rest since on the sixth day they could gather twice as much manna and on the seventh there would be none to gather, they were to stay in their tents and just rest.

Too often, we don’t want this blessing of rest. We make our plans, go our way, and run until we drop. If you’ve worked with children, you’ve seen this. Toddlers will clench their fists and dig their nails into their palms to fight the urge to sleep. They will run and move and roll and crawl trying to stay awake for as long as possible. Teenagers fear boredom. They can’t stand the calm and the quiet. Something has always got to be happening every minute of every day. “I’m bored. I’m bored,” you hear them repeat. I have a niece, God bless her, who once announced by mistake, “[Sigh,] I’m boring!” We all had good laugh about that.

So Israel is just beginning to learn the blessing of rest. “Stay in your tent” Moses tells them, out of the sun, out of the wind, out of the field, in the presence of your family, enjoying your food and remembering the Word of the Lord. For,

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At the end of the wilderness wanderings, Moses reflected back on these days. He said to Israel in His farewell message,

“[The Lord] humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 8:3).

Israel’s journey, Moses tells us, their hunger, their food, their time, their learning all served one purpose—that they might live by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

And this is God’s Word to you today: work hard. Pray for daily bread. Live out your calling but rest in Me. Rest in My Word. Let it be your life and your comfort. And when you gather to this life-giving bread, know that it is more than bread. Know that it is more than wine. Know that this is the manna of Christ’s body and blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

When the Word of the Lord is added to the bread and the wine, God here gives a heavenly food, one that sustains us in the one true faith unto life everlasting, unto journey's end. This is where the Lord is taking us today. And

[Antiphon:] Where the Lord leads, **blessings follow**. Amen.