

EATING MANNA AND STUDYING THE BIBLE

“He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. “ (Deut 8:3)

Among other important lessons in this verse is the remarkable association between gathering manna and studying the Bible. Please consider:

- God brought His people out of Egypt with a high hand (Ex. 14:8; Nu. 33:3).
- Then God humbled them.
 - Note that God “led the people” with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Ex. 13:20 - 22).
 - It was therefore not an accident that Moses led the people from the Red Sea into the Desert of Shur where they were without water for three days (Ex. 15:22).
 - Truly, the people of God were humbled.
 - It is sobering to realize that God can deliberately arrange circumstances that will humble us too!
- God also caused them to hunger. This was key to their survival. If animals, birds, and fish did not get hungry they would not hunt for food and would die of starvation. The same is true of man!
- God chose to feed Israel in a unique way. He gave them a special bread from heaven. Ps. 78:25 called it “the bread of angels”. No one had ever seen this before. After their wilderness journey no one would ever see it again. So, when they did see it, they said: “manna”, which means, “what is it?”
- God is all powerful. He could have fed His people in an infinite number of ways.
 - God ordered the ravens to feed Elijah (1 Ki. 17:4).
 - At Zarephath God miraculously caused a handful of flour and a little oil to feed Elijah, a widow and her son for three years (1 Ki. 17:12- 16).
 - Jesus fed 5,000 men plus women and children with five small barley loaves and two small fish and had food left over (Jn. 6:5 - 13)
 - God is all powerful! He could have fed His people any way He wanted to. He chose, however, to feed them with manna.
 - One reason for doing so, was to teach them that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.
- Let us therefore prayerfully consider some of the ways that eating manna helps us to understand how we are to study the Bible.

GATHERING MANNA WAS NOT EASY

When we hear that God rained down manna from heaven we are apt to assume that it was easy to survive on free food. Such was not the case.

- When the manna fell it was necessary to go outside the camp to gather their daily rations.

- Therefore the Hebrews had to leave their homes and walk outside the camp. We assume they walked beyond where the animals were kept, in order to gather their manna.
- There was only a brief window of opportunity to gather the manna. It did not appear until the dew was gone (Ex. 16:14); and it melted away when the sun grew hot (Ex. 16:21).
- There was also intense competition because there were many thousands of people gathering manna at the same time.
- The manna could be boiled or baked (Ex. 16:23), but both wood and water were scarce in the desert. Gathering the manna was not easy, neither was preparing it.
- The manna had to be gathered every day, for anything left over became filled with maggots and stank (Ex. 16:20). On the sixth day, as you know, God made special provisions to preserve the manna so they did not have to work on the Sabbath (Ex. 16:24).
- No one could gather manna for anyone else. Every person had to gather a daily portion of manna for himself (Ex. 16:16).

STUDYING THE SCRIPTURES WAS NOT EASY

- As you know, there were no printing presses in those days and no copies of the Bible were available.
- The book of the Law, that Moses wrote, was placed beside the ark of the covenant (Deut. 31:26). This copy would have been next to impossible for the average person to read.
- When they crossed over the Jordan, however, God commanded them to set up large stones and coat them with plaster. Then they wrote upon those stones all the words of the Law (Deut. 27:3). This made the Word of God accessible, but not easy. In order to read the Law for themselves they had to travel to the place where they crossed the Jordan.
- The Hebrews were commanded to write these laws upon the door frames of their homes, and to also make copies to bind on their foreheads and hands (Deut. 6:4 -9).
- Obviously, finding and copying the Law of God was not easy. Yet, God expected His people to not let this Book of the Law to depart out of their mouths and they were to meditate upon it day and night (Josh. 1:8).
- They needed the Scriptures for spiritual nourishment, just like they needed manna for physical nourishment. The Scriptures were to be an integral part of their daily conversation and something which they would teach diligently to their children.
- Please note that famine and pestilence go together. When people do not have enough physical food to eat they are vulnerable to infection and disease. The same is true spiritually. When we do not study the Bible we become vulnerable to spiritual attacks by Satan.

MANNA WAS SUPERNATURAL

- Manna sustained the Hebrew people in the wilderness for 40 years. It miraculously fell from heaven for the first time when they began their wilderness journey (Ex. 16:4). It miraculously stopped falling from heaven 40 years later when the Hebrews entered into the Promised Land (Josh. 5:12). Since it was never to fall down from heaven again, God

commanded that a jar of manna be preserved before the Lord so that generations to come would be able to see what it was (Ex. 16:33).

- Six days of the week the manna could not be kept over night. In preparation for the Sabbath, Day, however, it was miraculously preserved (Ex. 16:24).
- On the Sabbath Day no manna fell from heaven (Ex. 16:25). This too was a miracle.
- Since manna was their only food, God supernaturally designed it to meet all of their nutritional needs. When they grumbled about the manna God was not pleased.
- God also miraculously sustained them so that their clothing did not wear out and their feet swell for forty years (Deut. 8:4)
- They were also told: **“Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you” (Deut. 8:5).**

THE SCRIPTURES ARE ALSO SUPERNATURAL

- **“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim 3:15, 16).**
- **“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” (Heb 4:12-13)**
- **“And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. “ (1 Thess 2:13).**
- Jesus said: **“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Matt. 24:35).**
- These Scriptures could easily be multiplied.

MANNA COULD ADAPT TO MEET THE NEEDS OF EVERY PERSON

- **“The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. And when they measured it by the omer, he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed. ” (Ex 16:17-18)**
- In families, as well as nations, we have people at different levels of intelligence and ability. Yet, everyone who gathered manna, miraculously had the amount they needed. This enabled the immature, the aged, and the infirm to always have all of the nourishment they needed.
- Nourishment, as you know, is not only important for growth, but also for fighting illness and infection. A healthy body, however, has the capacity to take nourishment and direct it to our ever changing needs. The same meal, for example, can help a young person to grow teeth, heal a cut, fight off the flu, or mend a broken bone. All the physical needs of the Hebrew people came from a single source.

THE SCRIPTURES CAN ALSO MEET THE NEEDS OF EVERY PERSON

In the days of Nehemiah we are told that all the people assembled as one man to hear the Word of God. The group was composed of men and women and all who were able to understand. Ezra, the scribe, began reading at daybreak and read until noon. All the people listened attentively. (Neh. 8:1 - 3).

One can easily imagine the infinite number of needs in such a vast crowd. Yet, the young fighting their passions, and the elderly fighting depression, all received what they needed from the Word of God. Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

THE SCRIPTURES ARE THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

“Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” (Eph 6:12-18)

The Scriptures not only come from the Spirit, they are designed to defeat spiritual enemies. Remember! **“The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.” (2 Cor 10:4)** You cannot demolish a spiritual enemy with a physical weapon. A gun or a bomb is totally ineffective on a spiritual enemy. The Scriptures are therefore indispensable in fighting Satan!

The Latin word for sword is “gladius” from which we get the English word “gladiator”. It was a short sword about 18 inches long which was used by Roman soldiers for 600 years. It was deadly because the Roman soldiers were trained to get so close to the enemy that their long swords were ineffective. The novice, of course, could easily be defeated! One must practice with the sword to know how to use it properly.

The Greeks had two words for sword. The first was “rhomphaia” which refers to a long sword or spear. The “sword of the Spirit”, however, is the Greek word “machaira”. As we have said, it was a short sword especially designed for face to face combat. The Word of God is most effective when you are face to face with someone.

CHILDREN CAN LEARN THE SCRIPTURES AT AN EARLY AGE

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim 3:14-17)

TIMOTHY ACTUALLY BEGAN LEARNING THE HOLY SCRIPTURES WHILE HE WAS STILL IN THE WOMB! His faith dwelt first in his grandmother Lois, and his mother Eunice, but ultimately in him (11 Tim. 1:5). These women were obviously his primary teachers. His father was a Greek (Acts 16:1) and apparently did not help Timothy to “know the holy Scriptures”. His mother, and grandmother, however, taught him the holy Scriptures from the time he was a “brephos”. That is, they taught him the Scriptures before he was born, and from the time of his “infancy”. They apparently did precisely what God commanded all of His people to do. They taught Timothy as they were lying down, rising up. Teaching was a part of all their daily activities. Since the Word of God was in their heart they talked about it all the time. Remember! Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Lk. 6:45).

The versatile Greek language has at least six different words all translated as “child” in the KJV of the Bible. They are: *huios*, *teknon*, *pais*, *paidion*, *nepios*, and *brephros*. The word translated as “child” in our text is “*brephos*”. Thayer, in his Greek English Lexicon, defines the word as (1) An unborn child, embryo, fetus; (2) A newborn child, infant, babe. The NIV translates this word as “infancy”. *Brephos* occurs eight times in the N.T. Scriptures. They are listed here for your convenience.

- Luke 1:41 - “. . . the *babe* leaped her womb . . . “
- Luke 1:44 - “. . . the *babe* leaped in my womb for joy . . . “
- Luke 2:12 - “. . . ye shall find the *babe* wrapped in swaddling clothes . . . “
- Luke 2:16 - “. . . they came with haste and found . . . the *babe* lying in a manger.”
- Luke 18:15 - “. . . and they brought unto him *infants* that he would touch them .”
- Acts 7:19 - “. . . they cast out their *young children* to the end that they might not live”.
- 1 Pet. 2:2 - “. . . as *newborn babes* desire the sincere milk of the word . . . “
- 11 Tim. 3:15 - “. . . from a *child* thou has known the holy Scriptures . . .”

Please note that Timothy “learned” the holy Scriptures from the time he was an “infant”.

It is easy to illustrate how rapidly children learn by visiting with immigrant families. Invariably children learn a new language more quickly than their parents. Further, the little children learn to speak new languages without an accent.

One way to graphically illustrate this truth is by citing examples of children who were raised

without any parents at all. These children are called “feral children”. The word “feral” means “fierce” or “wild”. Even though this condition is rare, there are still dozens of well documented examples. Consider, for example, the sad story of a Ukrainian girl named Oxana Malaya who was raised by dogs. She was discovered in 1991. After many years of therapy, however, she has almost no language skills and as of 2010 was confined to a home for the mentally handicapped. Then there is the story of the bird boy in Volgograd, Russia.. The newspaper Pravda reported that his mother did not starve or physically mistreat him, she just never spoke to him. Since his primary companions were birds, he does not speak words like a human, but chirps and flaps his arms like a bird. He was first placed in an asylum, but later moved to a center of psychological care. Another well documented case is that of Rochom P’ngieng, also known as the “Jungle Girl”. She was first observed in northeastern Cambodia on Jan. 13, 2007. Her father identified her by a scar on her back and stated that she had disappeared in the jungle at the age of 8 while herding buffalo with her sister. She was captured, but despite the best efforts of her family to civilize her, she preferred to live like an animal and in May 2010 fled back to the jungle.

Not all “feral” children live in the jungle. Many live in the city and some even attend public schools. While they may wear clothes they have still passed through those critical formative years with little or no parental guidance. Often functionally illiterate and socially retarded, these unfortunate children gravitate to gangs. In this antisocial environment they learn the language of the streets and adopt the harmful habits of their mentors. Yes! They can be converted to Christ and forgiven of sins, but their formative years of easy learning are gone forever. There was a time when they could learn three languages by the age of three, but not any longer. There was a time, when like a tender twig, the direction of their lives could be easily changed. Unfortunately, those tender days do not last forever.

The point is that parents and grandparents can take advantage of this window of opportunity to do what Lois and Eunice did for young Timothy. We can teach them the word of God from “infancy”. There is no excuse for Christian parents not teaching their children the Word of God!

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

When Peter was being interrogated by Christ by the Sea of Galilee, he sought to divert attention from himself by pointing to John and saying “**What about him?**” (Jn. 21:21). Jesus reminded Peter that what anyone else did was not his business. Jesus specifically commanded Peter: “**You must follow me!**” (Jn. 21:22).

The same principle applies to everyone! Everyone must give an account of his own stewardship to God (1 Co. 4:2). Some receive 5 talents, some 2, and some only 1. Each, however, is only responsible for what God has given him (Matt. 25:14 - 30). Remember! It was the lazy steward who misunderstood God and was condemned! Laziness is not a virtue. The average American family has more than one Bible in their home, and plenty of opportunities to buy more. Further we also have access to books, concordances, and commentaries to help us understand the Bible. There is no excuse for not studying the Scriptures every day.

Most are familiar with this biblical tribute: **“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” (Acts 17:11).** We remind you again, however, that the moveable type printing press was not invented for over a thousand years (A. D. 1439). Thus the noble Bereans would have to leave their homes and go to the local synagogue in order to examine the Scriptures. This was, of course, not easy. Remember, it would be some 1,200 years before the Scriptures were divided into chapters. It would, and some 1,500 years before the Scriptures were divided into verses. We repeat! It was not easy to “examine the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true”. Nevertheless, the noble Bereans did it and we can too! What’s your excuse for not examining the Scriptures every day?

Peter described how normal it is for believers to crave the Bible. He wrote: **“Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.” (1 Peter 2:1-3)** There is something seriously wrong when a newborn baby does not crave milk. There is also something seriously wrong when a Christian does not crave the Word of God.

Paradoxically, those who force themselves to study the Scriptures often develop a spiritual appetite, while those who do not force themselves to study the Scriptures lose what little appetite they had.

Fortunately, Jesus does not abandon us, or leave us like orphans (Jn. 14:18). He comes to us by means of the Holy Spirit to help us with any and every problem we face. We have His promise that He will never leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5)

HE WILL NEVER ABANDON YOU SO PLEASE DON’T YOU EVER ABANDON HIM!

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