

## MANNA IN THE WILDERNESS

You are probably familiar with the epic story of Israel's 40-year wandering in the wilderness. During this time, God announces that he will provide food for them. It is quite fascinating that of all the unlimited ways that God could have chosen to feed His people, He opted for such an unusual way of doing it—manna.

Here is the actual account:

*This is what the Lord has commanded: Each of you should gather as much as you can eat. Take two quarts for each person in your tent. So that is what the Israelites did. Some gathered more, some less. They measured it into two-quart containers. Those who had gathered more didn't have too much. Those who had gathered less didn't have too little. They gathered as much as they could eat. Then Moses said to them, 'No one may keep any of it until morning.'*  
Exodus 16:16–18 (GW)

Everything about God's miraculous and admittedly quite bizarre mealtime plan for His people—literally everything—seems to fly squarely in the face of our well-accepted American version of Christianity. This was very sobering, but even more sobering is contemplating how this might apply to how we steward the life and resources God has entrusted to us. There are three simple, yet profound, insights this story reveals regarding how God wants to be in relationship with His people.

### I. **God Provides... (Do we really believe it?)**

Intellectually, we will openly acknowledge that God provides. However, far too often we find ourselves casually acknowledging that God provides, while we sit around with everything we think we need right at our fingertips. If a time comes when we find ourselves running low or, even worse, running out of our provisions, or we find our income “well” has suddenly run dry, we can almost immediately find ourselves feeling anxious, stressed, worried, and fearful about what is going to happen to us.

Many of us may have unconsciously bought into the same lie that “God takes care of those who take care of themselves.” (The reality is, God never said this, Aesop did.) This oft-repeated axiom couldn't be further from the truth. But tragically, for many of us it has become our practical theology on life and provisions.

We functionally believe it is first and foremost up to us to make our way in the world. If and when we can't make it happen on our own, then (and often only then) will we look to God for a backup plan. This certainly was not God's model for Israel in the wilderness, nor does it fit the teaching of the New Testament. For the Israelites, God faithfully provided their food each day. All they had to do was just go out and pick it up.

Both Luke 12:22ff and Matthew 6:25ff, the two great “do not worry” passages, reinforce this very same message. God will provide for you. You just seek Him and His Kingdom and He will take care of you. Peter

further reinforces this security thinking in I Peter 5:7 (GW) when he reminds us, *Turn all your anxiety over to God because He cares for you.*

All of us would love to personally experience a miracle from God in our lives. The problem is that none of us wants to be in a position to ever need one! God chose to put the children of Israel into a position to need and see miracles on a daily basis. Might this story give us insight into the position God wants to be in with all His people for all time—daily looking to Him to sustain their lives? Why do we so quickly and easily fail to trust God to lovingly and consistently provide for our needs? Do you really believe God provides?

## **2. God Provides Enough... (Do we really believe it?)**

Not much has changed in human nature since the dawn of man. We are all prone to not know the answer to the question, “How much is enough?” Our stock American answer is routinely, “Just a little bit more.” Israel was certainly no different. The more industrious and resourceful among them apparently saw God’s daily provision as a way of securing their future—a way to stock up.

“After all,” they must have reasoned, “what could be wrong with building up an emergency reserve of three to six months of food in the event God forgets or fails to continue to take care of us in the future? Wouldn’t that just be good stewardship?” Would it? Is this commonly-promoted line of reasoning God’s way, or is it just the American way we have erroneously substituted for God’s way? Interesting question, isn’t it?

Honestly, building emergency reserves or retirement stockpiles from God’s daily provisions to secure our future does not seem to be God’s way. In fact, knowing the deceitfully wicked mind and heart of man (Jeremiah 17:9), God made it impossible for Israel to ever depend on accumulated emergency reserves, knowing that doing so would only enable them to put their trust in their accumulated provisions instead of in Him, their Provider.

Moses reports in Exodus 16:20 (GW), *But some of them didn’t listen to Moses. They kept part of it until morning, and it was full of worms and smelled bad.* They simply could not save up any extra (except on Fridays when they could gather up enough for both Friday and Saturday, the Sabbath day). Beyond that two-day supply, it was day-to-day provisions for 40 years. Are you attempting to rationalize away this idea that “God might want me to live my life with no reserves, no surplus and no extras?” Good luck!

In Proverbs 30:8-9 (NASB), Agur affirms the spiritual danger of having a surplus. He says, *Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is my portion, that I not be full and deny You and say, “Who is the LORD?” Or that I not be in want and steal, and profane the name of my God.* Agur’s point is obvious—give me just enough, because riches will tempt me to forget God, and poverty will tempt me to break His laws and dishonor Him. Do you think this tidbit of wisdom might apply to us today?

The New Testament also reinforces this “no surplus” message. Remember when Jesus taught His disciples (some of whom were very well-off financially) to pray? He told them to pray this way, *Give us this day our daily bread* (Matthew 6:11). This sounds an awful lot like a prayer that Israel might have been praying each morning, doesn’t it? Apparently, even after 1,500 years had passed, God still wanted his people to be depending daily on Him as their Provider.

Think about it. This part of His model prayer makes no sense whatsoever if we have months, years, or even a lifetime of surplus resources stashed away for our personal use. Many of us have stored up enough surplus that we could say with a great sense of security, *Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry* (Luke 12:19). Before you take too much comfort in this verse, know that God later calls the man who said this a *fool*.

What would be wrong with living a hand-to-mouth existence, if it was God's hand to your mouth? It seems like this is exactly the situation God wants all of us to be in: depending on Him on a daily basis to give us enough for that day. The greatest challenge is to determine exactly how we are supposed to live this way in the midst of so much excess. And if we do have a surplus, how do we prevent it from hindering our desire and ability to depend on God to take care of us on a daily basis? These are questions that we all need to honestly wrestle with. Do you really believe that God will always provide you enough?

### **3. God Provides Enough for Us to be Satisfied. (Do we really believe it?)**

One of the most profound statements that John Piper has ever made (and it is imminently on point right here) is this: "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him." There will never be a time in our lives when we are more in perfect harmony with the heart and the mind of God than when we are totally satisfied with just Him and what He chooses to provide to us—however much or little that might be.

Let's go a bit deeper. How do you currently understand what Paul says in I Timothy 6:8, *If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content? Would you be satisfied if all you had was enough food for your next meal and the clothes on your back? Is this where your "contentment bar" is set? Probably not. Should we be concerned that our "contentment bar" is set at a substantially higher level than where Paul tells us it should be set?*

Just two verses earlier in 6:6, Paul says, *godliness with contentment is great gain*. And remember, Jesus told His followers to *be content with your wages* (Luke 3:14). This contentment message is everywhere! Let's even go back to the Israelites: *Those who had gathered more didn't have too much. Those who had gathered less didn't have too little*. Everyone had enough. It seems that everything within us resists the idea of being satisfied with just enough, doesn't it?

Using Paul's standard for contentment, how much is enough for you to be satisfied? And if that "enough" was all God wanted you to consume of all He has entrusted to you, would you be both willing and glad to share all the surplus with others who don't have enough—allowing you to become one of God's conduits of provision to those who have a shortfall? Augustine articulates this idea so well: "Find out how much God has given you and from it take what you need [enough]; the remainder is needed by others."

We are all faced with an inescapable choice here. We are either going to have to make some substantial changes in how we are currently living, or we are going to have to ignore a preponderance of biblical teaching on how God wants to be in relationship with us.

I personally have been motivated to start making the needed changes in how I live and how much I consume to better align myself with this message. Emotionally and spiritually, I will openly confess, I am still trying to figure out how to do it in the midst of so much personal and national surplus.

What I do know is that God provides. He will always provide me enough. And I need to learn to be satisfied with what He decides is enough for me to consume, and then gladly and freely make the rest available for deployment at His discretion. Are you willing to also embark on this lifestyle-changing adventure—learning to be satisfied with what God says is enough?

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### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR — E. G. “JAY” LINK**

E. G. “Jay” Link has a unique combination of being an ordained minister with a Master Divinity degree in Biblical Theology and a professional Stewardship planning coach who for over 40 years has been working with very affluent Christian families to enable them to optimize their Kingdom impact with all that the Lord has entrusted to them to manage. After retiring from his personal practice, he then served for five years as Director of Taylor University’s Stewardship Planning Ministry, which he launched for them. Most recently, Jay founded the Stewardship Resource Group to serve Christian ministries, colleges, and churches to better minister to their highest capacity families. He has written six books, hundreds of articles and has provided extensive training curriculum for hundreds of professional financial and legal advisors in how to provide stewardship planning services for their clients.