

**Providence Equal to Need** (Exodus 16:1-27)

I The Israelites had not yet learned that God would take care of them. (We have seen on several occasions, and in several contexts, that most believers are not very different than they were. That is, we pray about our problems—sometimes. We tend to talk about God, more than we talk to Him, and when we do talk to Him, our conversations tend to be very ego-centric. Also, our trust in our Heavenly Father tends to be inversely proportional to the size of our bank balances. That is to say, most people trust themselves and their money, and when they see that one or both of these is inadequate, then we turn to God and ask Him for help—but the help we seek is rarely spiritual. Generally, our humanistic point of view gets in the way of our spirituality. May God help us to learn Him better!)

A This Bible story is very straightforward. (The Israelites had another big problem. They knew that they had arrived in this situation by following Moses, and so they blamed him for it. Then God proved Himself to be both concerned for their welfare and able to solve their problem, even though they had just proven in Chapter 15 that they had not yet learned to honor Him as their God. Would they ever? We might ask the same question of ourselves. Will we ever learn to trust God, and then to recognize His Hand as it works in our lives, and then thank Him for the blessings He sends into our lives? Now I, personally, think that within our small group, that most of us have learned such lessons; we know, at least in principle, that we are the Body of Christ and that we are responsible to God to perform His Holy Will, in our personal lives and corporately, as a Church. I also think that we don't usually understand how that learning applies to us, either individually or corporately, until after some crisis has past. Right now, today, we can see (with our spiritual vision anyway) that for us as a church, one kind of crisis has just passed, and that another looms just a few days or weeks away.

I say this because God has a message for us— I mean *our* little group— as a church (a real, capital-C-kind of Church): and it is the same as He told Moses in the last part of verse 4. *“In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions.”* Now we who have some familiarity with educational psychology know that there are basically two kinds of tests. One is to see whether a pupil has sufficient aptitude for a new course of instruction; the other is to see whether he has learned the lessons thus far taught. God knows how to do both kinds of tests. In the case of the Israelites, this was a sort of readiness test; and we too, as a Church, presently face the same kind of test, and the results of the test will affect everything that happens concerning us for a long time to come.)

B God made a special-case miracle, for a specific situation. (There was meat in the evening and bread in the morning, every day except the Sabbath, from that day until they entered the Promised Land, some 40 years later. Now we see that God says that it was a test of their obedience. What were their instructions? They were to gather enough in the evening for the next day only, and on the sixth day they were to gather enough for the Sabbath as well. They were not to gather any more or less than they would need for one day (or two days, on the day before the Sabbath); they could not stockpile it or hoard it, and it would spoil if they tried to. So, did they pass their test? We see that most people followed the instructions, but that there were some people who followed their selfish predilections, and then found out— the hard way —that God meant what He said. Let us, as a Church, learn from their mistake, and not test God. If we follow His instructions He will without doubt bless our church; if we are stubborn or rebellious, we can expect God to be patient with us, but not forever; we have seen what happened in one large institutional church which has forgotten the Lord Who gave it its life.)

II In John Chapter 6, Jesus claimed to be this manna. (There is some important

theology here, although it seems to be rather obscure if we think only with our natural, carnal intelligence. Yet we need to get this very clear, because the Bible is one coherent message from beginning to end: *it's all about Jesus*. If we can remember that, and do all and say all *in the name of Jesus* then we will pass the great test of our obedience, which looms before us. Now let us be certain about this: what is the antecedent for the pronoun *it* when I say, "*It's all about Jesus*"? Literally, everything, from the beginning of Creation until the final *Amen* at the beginning of eternity, is our antecedent. Colossians 1:16 tells us, *For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him; and then, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created* (Revelation 4:11).

That part about Creation has special significance here, for both the Israelites and for us. Beginning with the time of Abraham and until that moment, Israelites had not been a nation; but God intended to make a nation of them. For us, what were we, before January 2011? We were individual believers who tried (mostly inconsistently) to do what God wanted us to do in our individual lives; but now, God will make a Church out of us, if we just remember that *we are about Jesus*.)

A Let us read John 6:53-58 together. (Do you know where Israel found its corporate (or we could say, national) identity? That part went back as far as the first Messianic prophecy in Genesis 3:15. Over time, God established a *Messianic Covenant* with humanity, and there were several junctures in history when that Covenant was established in certain families and their descendants. God established His Covenant with Noah, then Abraham, Isaac and not Ishmael, and Jacob and not Esau, then upon the death of Jacob, in the tribe of Judah. Now a

Covenant is a 2-way kind of agreement, and it is solemn and sacred; it cannot be violated by either party. God's part was to send His only begotten Son into the world to die as the once-and-for-all sacrifice for all sins of all mankind; and the part that humanity must perform was to have faith in the Grace of God for the Redemption that this Savior would provide. In Old Testament times, some people symbolized their faith in that Covenant with sacrificial animals, but most people had no idea at all that God loved humanity and wanted to save us from sin. The national identity of Israel consisted in their being the people with whom God established and maintained this covenant relationship. God intended for them to be both the evangelists who preached that Covenant to the world, and the administrators of that Covenant. That role would make Israel a very different kind of kingdom than any other on earth, a Kingdom of Priests, and God symbolized just how special they were for them by this special miracle. When Jesus claimed to be the Bread of Life, He was expressing His role in the creation, nurture, sustenance, and indeed everything about life for Old Testament Israel.)

B The implications of Exodus 16 are profound. (First, and obviously, Israel failed the test, not just on this occasion but on many subsequent occasions too. Secondly we should note that their failure was related to the inability of the Jews with whom Jesus spoke to understand His sermon. For Jesus, true children of Abraham understood their Covenant relationship with God the same way that God understood it, and honored the Word of God by obeying it; the Jews to whom Jesus was speaking were not *spiritual* children of Abraham, because they did not participate in the Covenant relationship with God properly. (They participated in a very humanistic way, by performing the *works of the law* only, without entering into the *spirit of the law*— which was, and is, love for God; their hearts were not right with God. It is the same when people in our time go to

church regularly, repeat the Apostles' Creed every Sunday, and follow all the Ordinances of the church— specifically, baptism and communion—without ever repenting sins and being born again as children of God.) Since these Jews were not *spiritual* children of Abraham by their faith in the Old Testament Covenant, there was only one other *spiritual* father for them to be descendants of. This is why Jesus said that they were of their father the devil, in John 8:44.

Another profound implication of Exodus 16 bears elaboration here, because it is also a symbolic representation of our own, personal relationship with God. It is that you need not be Moses, or Aaron, or Miraim, or pastor, evangelist, teacher, or other kind of minister, or even especially holy, to benefit from the blessings of God. Disobedient Israelites could gather quail and manna every day whether they tried to hoard it or not; and they could gather it again on the first day of the week whether they respected the Sabbath Day restrictions or not. So let us note that even if you make big mistakes in your spiritual life, God still loves you and He will still be patient and forgive you, just as many times as you confess and repent your sins. Also, God held Israelites accountable, individually *and* corporately; and He has not changed. By this we mean to say that if one Christian makes a problem for all Christians, then we all need to solve the problem together; it is no use telling someone that we don't want them to be part of our lives any more. We are all responsible for each other, to help each other become better Christians. In that regard, I need all of you to pray for me, so that I can tell who is and who is not *really and sincerely* trying to become a better Christian, and distinguish them from people who are only playing religion-games with us (on behalf of one or another institutional church). We want to welcome the first kind to join us; and we want to avoid the scandalous pretentiousness of the second kind altogether.)

C Humanistic people don't like to do things God's way. (Many people do not

even recognize God's Ways when the paths of our lives intersect them. **Let's read Psalm 2 together.** Here we see that there is a warning to the kings and rulers of the earth: to be wise, to serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Now those activities are anathema to the humanist, who considers his own intelligence, and the contrivances of his own imagination, to be the measure of what is good and right. For the humanist, he is right if his logic is good and everyone else is wrong if they don't agree with him. Now what if we were to substitute the name "God" for "humanist"? Then we would have a very good description of how God thinks. (God thinks that He is right, because He is God.) God is spirit and man is carnal. God made the original commandment (*not to eat the forbidden fruit*) and man made the original sin (*disregarding the commandment*). Humanism (in the mind of Cain) proceeded to attempt to rectify the problem by sacrificing the fruit of his own labor, and God rejected it. God rejected humanism in Psalm 2, too. In God's mind, there is but one standard of righteousness, and anything short of that absolutely holy standard is sin. It always has been and it always will be. That standard is the character of God Himself, and the only man who ever attained a level of perfection equal to the demands of God was Jesus Christ our Lord. The only way that any of the rest of us can ever measure up to that most high and holy standard of perfect righteousness is if God imputes the righteousness of Christ to us. He can do that because Jesus was God in the flesh; as God He is eternal and eternally infinite. Therefore Jesus Christ had enough righteousness in His life for all people who have ever lived, or ever will live.

God's Way (of reconciling humanity to Himself) is to exercise grace, thus to forgive sins for those who repent and are born again. Everything necessary for forgiveness and reconciliation to happen is present in Jesus Christ: as Son of Man He lived a perfectly sinless life and died on the Cross as if He had been a sinner.

As Son of God His infinite righteousness remained intact, and uncompromised by sin, either by the taint of the original sin or by the commission of sin during His lifetime. And so in His love for humanity, God used all of the infinity of the righteousness of Christ to credit our souls with Righteousness even though none of us had any of it in us. He laid all of our sins upon Jesus even though Jesus had no sin in His life. The heathen rage in their humanism because they refuse to accept the Grace of God, for doing so would require them to repent, that is, to admit that they are in the wrong and that the demand of God (for absolute holiness) is right.

So the manna in Exodus 16 and beyond is Jesus Himself. He is this Bread of Life. He gave Himself to the Israelites to keep them alive in the wilderness, and in the New Testament He points out to their descendants that they, too, must eat His flesh and drink His Blood (e.g., receive His Righteousness by imputation in Grace) if they want to live (forever, in Heaven, with our Heavenly Father). Now the idea of cannibalism was as abhorrent to them as it is to us, and they thought Jesus was crazy. They thought that they were listening to the son of Joseph and Mary (their first *woops!* if you will), not to the Son of Man and the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world.

Now there is one more point to be raised before we move on. The Israelites were the only people in history who ate manna. That means that they were the only people who lived because Jesus (the only begotten Son of God) became 3-dimensional material substance and they consumed Him. They ate the manna and lived. In the New Testament, Jesus (Who is still the only begotten Son of God) *became flesh and dwelt among us* (John 1:14), and then told people that they must eat His flesh and drink His blood in order to live. This may sound like cannibalism to the humanist, but to the Child of God it sounds like the means by which God puts His life into us, and we become one in spirit with Him, so that

His life is our eternal life, and our presence in this material world is His Presence here, in a Body we call Church. Then, *may God bind this Body together with the tendons of His Holy Spirit, and strengthen our bonds with love for Him and for one another, so that we might be His Body, the real, spiritual, Capital-C Church in fact, and not just in metaphor!*)

III You have heard it said, A priest represents God to people, and he represents people to God. (We shall revisit this point when we consider Israel as a Kingdom of Priests in Exodus 19; for now let us note simply that God intended to test them to see whether or not they would obey Him. If God demands obedience from all people, and accepts no excuses for sin, then should He not demand it all the more from the men who represent Him to all men? The answer is *Yes, of course He does*; how else could the man who claims to speak for God (when he delivers God's demand of absolute righteousness) show the rest of us that God trusts Him to be the messenger? And the Priest must represent all mankind to God. The priests of Israel did this by offering sacrifices to atone for sins; but this was only an imperfect symbol. It was a figure, or a model for them, of the Life and Work of our great High Priest, our Lord and our Savior Jesus Christ, Who offered His own Body as the sacrifice for the atonement of all sins of all mankind of all times. Israel was to become God's nation of priests; and we who claim to be the Body of Christ must also be the *royal priesthood of God* (I Peter 2:9), mediating and administering His New Testament Covenant of Grace.)

A Moses understood this principle very well (see v 8). (When he asked, *who are we*, he meant to make the Israelites remember that he was a servant of God only, and that everything he did and said came from God. He was certain that God would back him up unequivocally, too, for the sincere servant of God does not tempt God by identifying himself with God by making such a similar claim,

unless his words and actions really *are* those of God Himself. The only other man in all of history who could be so bold as to make such a claim was Jesus.)

B God spoke to Moses as if he, personally, were all of the Israelites. (The privilege of speaking for God as a prophet carries a great weight of responsibility. In the eyes of God, Moses represented all Israel. In verse 28, when *the Lord said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions?"* the pronoun you was plural; yet this ominous sounding question is directed to Moses personally, as if he, personally, were responsible for making everyone else obey. Moses did the only thing he could have done. He relayed God's Words to the Israelites faithfully, and then when God was ready to destroy them because of the Golden Calf (in Exodus 32), he interceded for them, and God spared them.)

C Living Water and Bread of Life were object lessons for Jesus. (We return then, to the Words of Christ in the New Testament. To the Woman at the Well in Samaria, He spoke of living water; to the Jews in John 6 He spoke of the Bread of Life. In both cases, He meant for people to understand that only He was the Way, and the Truth and the Life and that no one could get to God except by means of Jesus, that is, by hearing His message and appropriating it for their own lives in faith. Now the part where this touches us, as individuals or as a church, is what comes next. *After* we receive the Word of God, *after* we receive new life in the name of Jesus, *after* we learn from Jesus how to serve God by simple, humble obedience to His Law (of Love), then what? We, the members of the Body of Christ on earth, are responsible for publishing the message which we call the Gospel to all the world. In the eyes of God, we (as the temporal Body of Christ) are the royal priesthood of God in the world; we are the feet and legs that go to unwelcoming places; we are the hands and arms that distribute food, clothing, and medicine to the needy; we are the lips and tongue that speak; we must

represent God to the world we live in! And in the *ears* of God, we cry out for His mercy for all humanity, and not just selfishly for ourselves or for our friends and families. Let us be certain then that the words and deeds of the Kingdom of God are our words and deeds, and that the cry we make into the ears of God is the cry of all humanity for the mercy and grace from God, because that exists only in His great grace. This was the role God intended for Israel to take on the world stage; and it is the role He has assigned to the real, spiritual, Capital-C Church.)

IV God's ways may seem obscure to us. (Now to be sure, the obscurity is in our carnal minds, corrupted as they are by our humanism. In the mind of God His Ways are perfectly clear. He reveals His Ways to us as we pray and read the Bible; and let us be sure of this too: if we actually find the *real* way of God, that Way will be as clear to us as it was to Jesus, and to everyone else who has ever found it. Again we say, *it's all about Jesus* Who said that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. When we find that Way, we will no longer say, *I think that God's Will is...* because we will know without any doubt precisely what the Will of God is, for us as individual believers, and for us as a Church.)

A Even when we perceive His Plan, it might confuse us. (We are tempted to think, *surely God knows that I will do what He tells me to do once I know His instructions*; and in the next breath we ask why *God sends the rain on the just and the unjust alike*. This seems reasonable to us; to God, it is evidence that we do not yet see His Way as clearly as we want to think that we do. God led the Israelites out of Egypt, which was surely a good thing, and took them into the desert where they thought they would surely die, which was (in their imagination) a bad thing. Does God treat us like that too? Yes; and repeatedly, because we are just as much born in sin and unable to change ourselves as the Israelites were. God changes us, and He does it in the Way that He knows will be effective and

*permanent*. He puts us in a position where we have no hope without Him and then provides us with His hope; He deprives us of all the means we would use in His service and then provides us with His means. The heathen rages in humanism because he cannot do what he wants to do in the way that he wants to do it; the Christian rejoices in the all-sufficient Grace of Almighty God. Then, whether the Holy Spirit changes us (e.g., into the image of Christ) depends on our ability to appropriate the lessons God will teach us. God tested the aptitude of the Israelites for obedience; and He will test our aptitude too. We feel confused by God's methods because we are carnal and temporal, not spiritual. But as we grow in grace and in the knowledge we *become* more spiritual. It is for the presence of that spiritual life that God is testing; and He is the only one who can put it in us. He puts it there by our eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus, or for the Israelites, by their consumption of the manna. Let us seek for the Bread of Life and the Living Water then, in the only place where it can be found: in Jesus.)

B God will accomplish His holy will, with our co-operation, or without it. (God made the Children of Israel into a nation of priests, although many of them did not participate in its role; and He did it in a different way than they would have arranged for themselves. Similarly, God puts New Testament believers in the Body of Christ, too, even though some individual members of institutional churches cannot participate in the spiritual life of that Body, and even though the Life and Work of the Body (i.e. of Jesus) is not what the institutional church would like to make it appear to be. So let us state the Will of God plainly: that *we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ* (Ephesians 4:13) and *God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance* (II Peter 3:9). The part of humanity that comes to repentance and

realizes the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ will live forever with our Heavenly Father in His eternal Kingdom; that part which cannot will not pollute Heaven with the sins that they refuse to repent and forsake. Let us cooperate with God then, to accomplish His Will in our lives, and in the lives of those around us.)

C God's Will for us is remarkably similar to His plan for the Israelites. (God tested their obedience because they would need to be examples of obedience to His Law, as articulated in the 10 Commandments. God will test our obedience too, because we must be examples to the unbelieving world of obedience to His perfect Law of Love (for God, first and most) and for our neighbors as ourselves, which was the way Christ summarized the Law for the lawyers. So let us watch for tests of our love; because we will exactly nowhere with God until we prove our love for Him, by demonstrating His love to the world.)

V Christians must see themselves as tools in the Hands of God. (As Romans 12:3 puts it, let's not think of ourselves *more highly than we ought to think*. God is the Potter, we are the clay. God had a job for Israel to do, and He provided the food and water that they would need in order to have sufficient strength to do the job for Him. God has a job for us, too, and He knows how to provide the necessary resources (of strength and ability) for us as well.)

A God will provide what we need, to help one another grow in Christ. (We are all members of One Body, and that Body must grow until it reaches maturity in Jesus. We must help one another to become *better* Christians. God arranged the Body in such a way that it is led by Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers, and He equips each minister with the spiritual resources necessary to accomplish the growth of the Body unto maturity. As with the manna, there is enough for everyone, and no extra; and just as with the manna, the substance of

our resources is Jesus. They got manna and quail by going out to where God put it and collecting it. We will get Jesus by going to where God has put Him, that is, Jesus is the Soul in the Body we call Church; His Holy Spirit animates it with the eternal life of God Himself. We who propose to help others must help them by giving them Jesus. No other help is necessary, or even desirable.)

B God will provide what we need to do our part in world evangelism, too. (If we would obey God's Law of Love then we must demonstrate that obedience by showing His love in the world, and the only method we have for doing that in God's way is called *The Great Commission*. In other words, we must show God's love to the world in point of fact, not in high-sounding ecclesiastical rhetoric. Then how, exactly, can we do that in a place where one could be imprisoned for life if he simply gives away a Bible, or executed for proselytization if he attempts to persuade a muslim to convert? God knows how to make us humble enough to become martyrs for our faith if we must; but God knows how to raise up native missionaries like our Brother Joshua, too, so that the Gospel may be published in such places more expediently. We don't all have the free time, or financial resources, or academic credentials, to go somewhere else to do mission work; but if our hearts are in the right place God will provide us with everything we need to do exactly what He wants us to do, wherever we happen to be.

We must decide then, as a Church and as individual members of the Body of Christ, to surrender our wills to God's perfect Will, and allow His Holy Spirit to change us until we conform to the image of Christ. We will not always know how to do the changing, but God can provide all the grace we need for doing what He wants us to do (revealing His glory to people who are ignorant of it, for example). The test was and is an aptitude test, of our willingness to perform God's Will in God's Way, which is the only way that will bring it into fruition.)