

*Exodus 16:11-21*

<sup>11</sup>The LORD spoke to Moses and said, <sup>12</sup>“I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.’”

<sup>13</sup>In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. <sup>14</sup>When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground.

<sup>15</sup>When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. <sup>16</sup>This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.’” <sup>17</sup>The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. <sup>18</sup>But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed. <sup>19</sup>And Moses said to them, “Let no one leave any of it over until morning.”

<sup>20</sup>But they did not listen to Moses; some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul. And Moses was angry with them. <sup>21</sup>Morning by morning they gathered it, as much as each needed; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.

*Exodus 17:1–7 (NRSV)*

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. <sup>2</sup>The people quarreled with Moses, and said, “Give us water to drink.” Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?” <sup>3</sup>But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?” <sup>4</sup>So Moses cried out to the LORD, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” <sup>5</sup>The LORD said to Moses, “Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. <sup>6</sup>I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.” Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. <sup>7</sup>He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

*God sustains us, in and through all things.*

Food and water. Pretty darn essential stuff. Enough so to make the fleeing Israelites forget everything God had done for them. What is freedom from bondage when you are hungry and thirsty? A lot really . . . but we can picture them crossing the wilderness, complaining and whining, even threatening to return to Egypt. So, they learned more about this God-Who-Saves, that he could also be called the God-Who-Sustains.

*Manna*

More than 3,000 years ago, the Hebrew slaves who escaped from Pharaoh faced a pressing problem of nourishment: starvation. The problem was that there just hadn't been much time to pack. When Moses said go, everyone had simply dashed for the Red Sea. They somehow found the time to plunder the Egyptians, grabbing jewelry and clothing, but they had not prepared any food provisions other than some loaves of

unleavened bread.<sup>1</sup> When the Hebrew slaves reached the safety of the Sinai wilderness, they realized that choosing gold over food had perhaps not been the best decision and they began to complain, “you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger” (Exodus 16:3).

But of course, they were completely wrong. They were God’s people and God would provide for them. Soon, God began raining “manna” upon them, the “bread from heaven,” a flakey, nutritious substance that could be gathered off the ground each morning. When the sun grew hot, this bread from heaven melted, but there was no need to store any food. God provided them with fresh manna every day. A powerful reminder that God provides every day. It is so easy to forget that God is deeply involved in our daily lives, not just the occasional “big” moments. Terence Fretheim writes:

How common it is among the people of God that a crisis, whether of daily need or physical suffering, occasions a crisis of faith. Material and spiritual well-being are more closely linked than we often care to admit (see 6:9). The discernment of the people of God has often been so clouded by physical difficulties that they cannot see that God is much involved in providential ways in their everyday lives. Israel’s situation is not unlike a community of faith whose understanding of “act of God” has been largely determined by their insurance policies. **The connections of God with daily affairs has, for all practical purposes, disappeared** [emphasis added]. The resolution is not to stress the extraordinary acts of God one more time but to keep God linked with everyday blessings. And, as with Israel in this text, it will be in *discerning the presence of God in connection with daily needs* that they will be able to return once again to the confession: Yes, we now know, Yahweh is the one who brought us out of Egypt; Yahweh is God indeed. God’s dramatic acts of creation are of one piece with daily blessings. The confession of the one is tied closely to the confession of the other. Moses’ task is to instruct the people such that the divine factor in *every* blessing is made apparent.<sup>2</sup>

It is this story that Jesus draws on in the Lord’s Prayer. To pray for our daily bread is to acknowledge the discipline of “dailyness” that is God’s way. In ways large and small God provides for us. All we have comes from God, even our lives – and Jesus’ prayer teaches us to be thankful – daily, in all things and at all times. We humans can be fiercely independent, resisting the very notion that we are dependent on God. But, every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer we acknowledge that God provides for us every single day. He always has and he always will.

But this “dailyness” isn’t the only point of the manna story. This is also a story of abundance. So much food that it covers the ground. So much food that everyone’s needs are met. This too is God’s way. Can anyone doubt that in 2020 we humans are capable of growing enough food to eradicate hunger and starvation? Of course we can and probably do. So why does starvation still stalk the planet? Because of war, greed, fear, theft, indifference, and so on. Though that is our way; it is most assuredly not God’s way. God is gracious, sustaining us in all his fullness.

### *To be filled*

In the chronicling of American anxiety and unhappiness, which has worsened not lessened over the last five decades, so much of it seems to stem from a deep dissatisfaction and emptiness. We might chase after lots of stuff and status in this life as we seek to fill our hearts with a lot more than food and water, but as Augustine wrote more than 1500 years ago, our hearts will not rest until they rest in God, or as Paul puts it in his letter to the Ephesians, until we are filled with all the fullness of God. Here is Paul’s short prayer on behalf of the believers in and around Ephesus:

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<sup>1</sup>The bread they take is unleavened because there was not even enough time to wait for the bread to rise.

<sup>2</sup>Fretheim, T. E. (1991). Exodus (p. 183). Louisville, KY: John Knox Press.

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:14–19, NRSV)

But what an odd phrase. How could we possibly even speak of being filled with God's fullness? We are not God. Is it simply some sort of nice sounding but meaningless sentiment? Of course not. Rather, it is the climax of the prayer. Paul prays that the Christians, individually and as a body, might be strengthened in their inner being, rooted and grounded in love as they come to comprehend and to know the limitless love of Christ. Paul prays that Christ might dwell in the hearts of these Christians. And

### God's Chosen People?

Few topics are as perennially confusing to Christians as what we mean by "God's chosen people." And it can be emotionally charged, especially in light of the Christians' treatment of Jews over the centuries. But the best place to begin is seeking to understand what the biblical writers meant, particularly two Jews, Peter and Paul.

When God chose Abraham, God set about to form a people who would be his people. God would teach them what it meant to be his people. They would be a holy people, set apart for God's work. They would love God and love one another. Abraham's family would become the nation of Israel and, later, the people known as the Jews.

But what changed with the arrival of Jesus? Most Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah and the movement, the Church, became overwhelmingly Gentile. So much so that Judaism and Christianity became like two rivers flowing away from one another.

But Paul and Peter are both Jews. Indeed, Paul is a Pharisee. Has Jesus given birth to a new "chosen people?" Are their fellow Jews who reject Jesus still "God's chosen," still the elect of God? What does Peter mean when he calls the community of believers, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people"?

In his letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul has to deal with these questions as he strives to unify the Jewish-Christians and the Gentile-Christians. What constitutes the people of God? A shared ethnicity? A common faith in God? How are the formerly pagan Gentile-Christians to see the failure of the Jews to keep the covenant they had made with God? Can the Jewish-Christians expect that the Gentile-Christians will keep the Jewish food laws, the Sabbath, the rite or circumcision, and so on?

For Paul, and in the end for Peter as well, this Jesus movement was not about "Jews converting to Christianity." Paul could never have thought in those terms. Paul doesn't see himself as having a new religion, but a reconfigured one – reconfigured around Jesus Christ. Though Paul is missionary to the Gentiles, his hope is that his fellow Jews will yet come into the family of Christ, that the broken off branches will be rejoined to the tree. Paul's heart is broken over the fact that so many of his fellow Jews have rejected Jesus, thereby removing themselves from God's people, at least for awhile. For, at the same time, Paul believes that God will figure out a way to get them back in.

In the midst of God's work among the Gentiles and the unbelieving Jews, Paul writes, the Gentile Christians must not see Israel's "stumbling" as reason for any feelings of superiority. The Gentiles' salvation is bound up with Israel's. There is not one covenant (the new) which replaces another (the old) and there are not two covenants running alongside each other. There is one God, one Lord, one Spirit, one baptism . . . one covenant for Jew and Gentile alike.

For Paul, with the coming of Christ, there is one and only one badge of membership in the people of God: *faith in Jesus Christ*. This is the badge that identifies God's "chosen people." This and none other.

all of this takes our eyes and hearts ever upward to the very fullness of God. If only the Israelites had grasped even a glimpse of such fullness.

In another letter, Paul spoke of this fullness: “For in him [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him . . . (Colossians 2:9-10).” It is not that we are God, but that in Christ we participate in the fullness of God that dwelt in Jesus. This fullness is “already” ours, but “not yet” fully. It is ours and it is our goal. We are moving toward God’s fullness, which we can best understand as God’s presence and power. Such a bold prayer by Paul. It may be a bit fuzzy, but that’s how it often is when we seek to understand God and the things of God.

Surely Paul would want us to understand that only in God can we find the sustenance abundance (v. 20) that God desires for us. If we seek first anything other than the kingdom of God, we will be disappointed. But if we seek God, living within his moral will for our lives, then at the end of our journey we will find a fullness, a love, sustenance beyond our imagining. Indeed, we will find that what we thought would be the end of the journey is only the end of its beginning.

## Scott Engle’s Bible Classes

### **Monday Evening Class**

A study of Matthew’s Gospel

Meeting on-line at 3pm Monday on Scott’s Facebook page. Search for “Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC.”

### **Tuesday Lunchtime Class**

A study of Genesis

Meeting on-line at 12:00 noon Tuesday on Scott’s Facebook page. Search for “Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC”.

#### *About the weekday classes:*

Join us whenever you can. Each week’s lesson stands on its own. This is very “drop-in.” Bring something to eat if you like, wear your pj’s.-- we’re on-line now so who’d even know. Have a Bible handy.

Both classes are now recorded and are available each week in my new podcast at [scottengle.podbean.com](http://scottengle.podbean.com). They are also available on Apple podcasts. Search by my name, “Scott Engle”.

### **Scott’s Sunday Class**

Meeting on Sunday at 11:00 on Scott’s Facebook page. Search for “Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC.”

Beginning 9/27: *Seven Books that Rocked the Church*

**Videos of all three classes are posted on Scott’s YouTube channel.** Search for “Scott Engle.” These videos are posted as soon as possible after class.