

GOD IS...GENEROUS

Psalm 78:21-25

The Hebrew poet Asaph composed a psalm, Psalm 78, about Israel's experiences in the wilderness after God brought them out of Egypt. He poeticized that history to "tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD"¹ (*Psalm 78:4*) so they would avoid the rebellion that characterized the wilderness generation. In his song, Asaph contrasted Israel's disobedience with God's generosity, writing that God "rained down on them manna to eat" that He sent "in abundance" (*Psalm 78:24-25*). Asaph's comment about the manna God gave Israel reveals an important characteristic of God – He is generous. We will therefore consider manna's story in the Bible and what insights it offers us into God's generous character.

Bread from heaven

- Exodus chapter sixteen records Israel's journey from the Red Sea to the wilderness of Sin and focuses on the nation's complaint that God rescued them from Egypt to bring them into the "wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (*Exodus 16:1-3*).
- God responded to the peoples' complaint by announcing to them that He was "about to rain bread from heaven" for them (*Exodus 16:4*), but the "bread" He gave them did not resemble any bread known to Israel (*Exodus 16:15*). For example:
 - The bread, which Israel called "manna" (*Exodus 16:31*), appeared on the ground each morning as "a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground" and would melt in the sun's heat (*Exodus 16:14, 21*).
 - Even though it was "fine as frost on the ground", it could be ground up, beaten, boiled, and could be made into cakes (*Numbers 11:8*).
 - Its appearance was "like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey" (*Exodus 16:31*), like "cakes baked with oil" (*Numbers 11:8*).
 - If misused, the manna would become foul and worm-filled (*Exodus 16:20*).
- God intended the manna He gave Israel to do more than merely satisfy their food need; He intended it to teach Israel to rely on His generous goodness.
 - When God announced His plan to give Israel manna, He told Moses that He intended it to test the nation's willingness to "walk in [His] law" regarding the Sabbath command (*Exodus 16:4-5, 22-28*).
 - The Sabbath command sought to remind Israel that their life and livelihood depended on God the creator who made a good and abundant world (*Exodus 20:8-11*).
 - The manna and its connection to the Sabbath sought to teach Israel to depend on God (*Deuteronomy 8:3*).

¹ All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.

- Israel could rely on God, not only because of His identity as the creator, but also because the manna revealed His intention “to do [them] good in the end” (*Deuteronomy 8:16*). A few features about the manna point to God’s good intentions:
 - He gave them the manna for their entire time in the wilderness with dependable abundance (*Exodus 16:35; Nehemiah 9:20-21*).
 - He gave them manna regardless of their rebellion against Him.
 - He gave them “bread from heaven” (*Exodus 16:4; Nehemiah 9:15*).
 - Unlike the gods of the nations around them to whom their peoples gave gifts of food, God gifted His heavenly food to Israel (*cf. Psalm 78:23-25*).
 - To emphasize manna’s specialness, the Bible associates it with the pre-fall Edenic world (*Numbers 11:7; Genesis 2:12*).
- Rather than learning to trust God’s good and generous character through their experiences with His heavenly bread, Israel instead loathed God’s manna (*Numbers 11:6; 21:5*).

Applications

- God is good and He is generous.
- Even though He is good and generous, our own stubborn selfishness can cause us to loathe His goodness and generosity.
- God’s generosity may not always express itself in the ways we desire; the difference between our expectation and its expression reveals areas in which we need to change.
- God generously gave manna to Israel, but He used it to do more than address their need for food; He also used it to test them and to teach them. God’s multilayered implementation of His generosity reminds us that we need to prepare ourselves for layers of purpose in the things God causes to happen in our lives.
- Jesus identified himself as God’s new manna (*John 6:25-59*); we can see in him the same things we see in God’s manna. Jesus shows us:
 - The goodness and generosity of God.
 - The potential to reject him and loathe God’s generosity.
 - God’s efforts to bless, teach, and test people through his life and teachings

The story of God giving Israel manna in the wilderness offers one example of the Bible’s numerous stories that illustrate God’s goodness and generosity. The Bible repeats that message through many different stories because God’s people often denied His goodness and rejected His generosity. Let us pray that we can learn about the goodness of our God from those stories so that we avoid rehearsing the mistakes made by so many of God’s people.