

**Title: The grumpiest chapter in the Bible - Exodus 16**

**Purpose:** To understand the route and pattern of a sustainable spiritual contentment & satisfaction.

## INTRODUCTION

### Two questions

**Q. When was the last time you can recall feeling really CONTENT - truly SATISFIED & HAPPY?**

Q. Was it in the **last 7 days?**

Q. Was it sometime in the **past 30 days?**

Perhaps - you **can't quite remember** - IT'S BEEN A WHILE REALLY.

OK Question #2:

**Q. When was the last time you can recall feeling quite UNHAPPY?**

Q. Was it in the **last MONTH?**

Q. Was it in the **last WEEK?**

Q. **YESTERDAY - TODAY?**

### Spotting deer

It is my suspicion that most people - whether people of faith or not - find that **HAPPINESS - CONTENTMENT is just like "spotting a deer"** - just every now and again you are lucky - you're driving along and you spot one at the back of a field you can just make it out but because your driving you only get a brief glance.

Sometimes you get lucky and the deer appears actually along the road in front of you and for a few precious moments you get to gaze at the deer, you admire its beauty, perhaps it even runs for a while ahead of your car - and then it's gone through a gap in the hedge.

And you say: "Wasn't that nice - so very sweet."

### This morning

This morning **we come to a people** that were becoming marked out by the fact that they were **more often GRUMPY than HAPPY.**

Surveying the word **GRUMBLE** or GRUMBLING in the **OT** reveals that it turns up **just over 20 times** and virtually ever occurrence is here in Exodus or in Numbers (which is essentially the continuing story of the desert wanderings that the book of Exodus begins).

And **this chapter** here is the absolute "**high-point of grumble**" with no less than **7 references.**

So perhaps **EXODUS 16** would qualify as - "**the most grumpy chapter of the whole OT**" - that place where God's people show how deeply unhappy they are.

### Lottery winners

A British clinical psychiatrist did a study and discovered that big money lottery winners, six months after their win, statistically are no happier than victims paralysed from car accidents.

Here, as we enter Exodus 16, we join a people who complain that they don't have enough despite:

- having just been treated to the most massive kindness of God rescuing them from a life of great monotony and misery
- AND despite having been the recipients of the most massive lump sum payout as they thoroughly plundered the Egyptians of their GOLD, their SILVER and their finest GARMENTS & GOODS!!

### Pinning down their problem

It is always helpful to know where we have got to in terms of the journey that the Israelites are on.

This chapter like so many others give us the kind of "**Captain's Star Date Log**":

Exodus 16 Verse 1 "The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin (which, by the way, does not mean the 'Desert of Wickedness' - rather it is simply related in some way to the place Sinai), which is between Elim and Sinai, on the **fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt.**"

Now **after 3 days** of that Wonderful Miracle of their Rescue and Redemption from the Land of Slavery - their THIRST kicked in and they, basically, "kicked off"!

Now that they are not 3 days **but 30 days** into the journey it is **\*not\*** a **DROUGHT** that is causing them problems **but more of a FAMINE**. It appears that their reserves of food had reached an all-time low (and obviously you can cope somewhat longer without food) BUT the end result is exactly the same as before.

It is funny - you would think - that they don't just stop and look at the bigger picture of things.

You know just think back to what happened earlier on in the month and recall that just as the water supply was critical they complained and God had stepped in - (however the reality was that Elim was only just over the horizon and if they had trusted God and not capitulated everything would have been just fine).

### Their habitual discontent

Given that the same problem is merely repeating itself all over again - we see that their grumbling is really only symptomatic.

Underneath or behind their grumbling is the reality that their **ALLEGIANCE**, their **APPETITE** is **very strongly tied to "EVERYDAY CONCERNS"**.

Somehow for these Israelites, and by extension ourselves:

- the DAILY was what had persuasive power and **\*not\*** the DRAMATIC

They had seen remarkable things:

- Plague after plague and remarkable deliverance from each one
  - Passover deliverance from the death of the first born
  - A crossing of the Red Sea on dry land
  - A bitter water supply made good
- So - putting that another way, it seems that between the MIRACULOUS and the MUNDANE - the MUNDANE would call the shots every time.

### Summarising the problem

So, before we go any further, let me just summarise some of the lessons that this GREAT GRUMBLING chapter of the Bible (Exodus 16) is showing to us:

- **the FIRST is that** - DISCONTENTMENT comes to us easily and insistenty - it started after only 3 days and was repeated before the month was out
- **the SECOND is that** - DISCONTENTMENT does \*not\* appear to be remedied by the presence of remarkable MIRACLES
- **the THIRD is that** - behind, or underneath the DISCONTENTMENT is a **very powerful ALLEGIANCE or TIE to "EVERYDAY MATTERS"** - to what you might call "EVERYDAY NECESSITIES" (so food, drink etc.)

And when you look at it like that you see that what we face is no small problem.

It is like we have an APPETITE that is not easily satisfied and it's like what ever you give it is somehow not enough.

Q. So then, what can be done?

And the answer that comes out of the passage is located in the MANNA.

So what I want to do for the rest of the time is to simply look at God's answer under two headings:

#1 - what I'm going to call: **"The Manner of the MANNA"**

#2 - and then: **"The Meaning of the MANNA"** so #1 then:

## 1] "The Manner of the Manna"

Some lessons we have to learn over and over again

It seems to be a fact of life that there are **SOME LESSONS THAT WE HAVE TO LEARN AGAIN AND AGAIN.**

**The way we learn tends to be very much LIKE A CORKSCREW** - it's shape is such that it goes around and around and only slowly makes it's way onward and upward.

If you ever wondered why the Israelites seemed to make the very same mistakes multiple times, it comes down to this fact of life that our learning style is not usually in leaps and bounds.

Drop by drop story - Andrew Anderson

I remember an occasion quite a few years ago. I was a keen, but somewhat younger Christian, and we had gone to some church celebration meeting and afterwards we were all gathered in the back hall enjoying some sort of buffet tea.

And I went up to the preacher for the occasion - a certain Andrew Anderson and I asked him why it was that Theology didn't really seem to get very directly taught in church and in preaching.

And I remember him saying to me (he was very patient - I was very much revealing my youthful ignorance in the question) that we do teach theology but it is very much DRIP by DRIP and DROP by DROP - this is how people learn.

This is a clue

Well our God is very wise and knows how to sensibly provide for His REGULARLY DISCONTENT people.

**Verse 4** reads: "Then the Lord said to Moses, **'I will rain down bread from heaven for you.** The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.'"

#### A provision AND a test

I can imagine that when the people heard that there was going to be "BREAD FROM HEAVEN" their mood must have started to change.

Of course it wasn't only BREAD that was going to be given them (at least on this occasion) there was going to be MEAT as well.

#### A very typical complaint

**Their complaint** had been **really very typical** and perhaps you can hear yourself in what they have to say:

**Verse 3** "...If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt!  
**There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted,**  
but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.'"

This is one of the oldest tricks in the book - Satan used this kind of deceptive technique when Eve was deceived in the garden of Eden. Satan was suggesting that God was "keeping something good from Adam and Eve because His intentions were not really as squeaky clean as He wanted them to believe".

And maybe you feel that about God that somehow He doesn't want us to enjoy ourselves too much - that He is determined to make life "nothing much more than bearable"!!

Of course the only bit they seem to remember in all of this are the "POTS OF MEAT" and an endless "SUPPLY OF BREAD" to wipe the gravy up with!!

Nothing about **whips & maltreatment & injustice & bricks without straw!!**

#### MEAT and BREAD from the sky

Well alongside the fact that God is going to rain down bread, they also learn that they are going to get their fill of meat in addition. God is going to match His PROVISION graciously to their DEMAND.

Q. What do you think was in their minds as the light of day started to fade?

Very possibly they would have **taken God's words somewhat literally** and they might have imagined full-sized loaves of bread or perhaps smaller items maybe like pitta's or panini's dropping out of the sky.

Perhaps their sense of humour was getting activated as they imagined what it would be like if someone got hit on the head by one OR loaves of bread getting stuck on a cactus plant!

Well evening arrived and maybe they were in their tents and all of a sudden there was a muffled thud and then another somewhere else - and maybe they thought "Great! A LOVELY CHUNK OF STEAK IS BEING CHUCKED OUT OF HEAVEN!!!"

#### God's WISDOM

And I think this is where we start to see God's WISDOM coming to play - it comes out in a number of ways - I want to give you 2 minor ways we see and then one more major way (on which I want to major!):

- **FIRSTLY** - the meat - it came as quail - live birds that were blown down all around the camp.

What this means is that it wasn't "TED'S TAKEAWAY" - already prepared.

God does not intend to TAKEAWAY from us what is a necessary and useful part of life - and that is work and effort.

- **SECONDLY** - although He provided meat for them on this occasion (just as they had dreamed of back in the days of Egypt) we have no record that this went on in any regular way.

What we are told has to do with the MANNA - the "bread from heaven" - that it was continuously provided without any interruption until the desert days were over.

Verse 35 "The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan."

So the second lesson here enshrined in God's menu is that he wants them to be able to distinguish between that which is luxury and that which is enough.

Morgan Spurlock - Super-size-me

If I said the name Morgan Spurlock, I'm guessing it wouldn't mean much, but if I said "**SUPER-SIZE-ME**", I am suspecting that quite a few of us will have watched or heard about the documentary that he did based on eating for 1 month exclusively at **MacDonalds 3 time everyday**. He daily intake was on average 5,000 KiloCalories and as a result, in just 1 month he **put on a stone-and-a-half** (a colossal 13% increase in his body mass), **had mood swings, sexual-dysfunction** and **fatty deposits on his liver!!**

God could have erected the largest and fasted "**drive-thru in the desert**" BUT HE DIDN'T because he cared too much.

- NOW - I did say that there was a THIRD more major piece of wisdom and for that **I want us to look at the way God provided the manna** - as the title for this section "**THE MANNER OF THE MANNA**":

### **THE PROVISION OF THE MANNA**

Parkway Newbury - French Bakery

Q. I don't know if you've been down to **Parkway in Newbury** recently - but if you have you may have noticed that they have introduced a **French bread shop/Cafe** and there **are probably a couple of reasons why they will succeed** in getting customers in:

- **ONE** - is that you have the product (the bread) presented in a very nice way - that is **the PACKAGING**
- **ALSO** - you have the product being placed in a **very inviting atmosphere** - the servers are dressed up in French style wearing berets and the music is, 'ow shall we say' - "TOUT FRANCAIS!" - so this is **the overall PACKAGE**

It is a powerful combination - so let's then look at the whole "**PACKAGE OF THE MANNA**":

- **FIRSTLY** - it comes in the morning first thing and then when the sun has got hot it will be gone.

Q. So what does that mean?

Well God is setting in place a pattern that means that they have to get up. **If they are lazy they won't get any food!**

- **SECOND** - God tells them what they are to gather - He **gives them a "guideline amount"**.

**Verse 16** "...Each one is to gather as much as he needs. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent. 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."

- **THIRD** - as **Verse 19** tells us "No one is to keep any of it until morning."

In a word - **NO STOCKPILING allowed**. We are to adopt a **DAILY RHYTHM** - it is one day at a time.

(I couldn't help but hear echoes of what Jesus Himself said when He was teaching about handling worry and anxiety - He said to them (Matthew 6 verse 34) "... do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.")

Now just like all children - these Israelites tested the boundaries and some of them kept the manna over to the next day and lo and behold it began to stink and have maggots in it! They discovered, the hard way, that God was not kidding.

Notice that God was **\*not only\* just giving them a DAILY RHYTHM** but He was **giving them a DAILY MIRACLE as well**.

As we had noted at the start it did not prove to be sufficient for these Israelites to have LARGESCALE DRAMATIC EVENTS to sustain them and prevent them becoming PROLIFIC GRUMBLERS - so instead here God is enshrining for them an element of the miraculous on a DAILY BASIS.

Q. Now how do we know that?

Well a second part of the RHYTHM that God installs for them is that ONCE EVERY WEEK the pattern will change. On every 7<sup>th</sup> day there will be no MANNA - it will mysteriously stop and then restart itself the following day.

It would be easy for the Israelites, if the MANNA came every day, for them to start to believe that actually it was some very natural phenomenon - that really it wasn't God doing it after all.

- So then **the FOURTH thing** about this whole PACKAGE was **\*not just\* the DAILY RYTHM but the Sabbath Day**.

Every 7<sup>th</sup> day (and for us now as we have come across into the NT this becomes the 8<sup>th</sup> day or the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the week and what we call the Lord's Day or the Christian Sabbath) every 7<sup>th</sup> day they would have a day off.

The previous day they would collect twice as much and notice that they would prepare all of it. (Observe too that part of the miracle was that the extra part would not go off, there would be no stink, no maggots just on this 7<sup>th</sup>

day).

They prepared all of it so that they would be properly clearing the decks for the Sabbath Day. This was a day for them and it was for REST and it was for an additional time of REFLECTION and WORSHIP.

In a sense it was like a weekly top-up-time - it would address their general weariness and also any spiritual weariness that was developing

Such a lot of wisdom in the way God has provided for them what they needed - food to sustain them but also he has INSTIGATED a really crucial DAILY PATTERN because He knows that the only way that we really make progress is by having things fed to us in small doses again and again.

Did you ever wonder why **THE LORD'S PRAYER**, when it's focus turns around to us kicks off with "**Give us this day our daily bread.**"

Well we've seen so far that Exodus 16 is all about GRUMBLING and BEING UNHAPPY/DISSATISFIED.

We've also seen that the first part of God's solution is what we called: "**The Manner of the MANNA**" (this KEY - 'DAILY aspect').

I want to now drive it home - to nail it down with #2:

## 2] "The Meaning of the Manna"

You may remember that when Jesus was being tempted by the Devil in the desert for those 40 days (and of course that is all very suggestive regarding a similar period of testing that was going on for the Israelites when they were in the desert for those 40 years - the number 40 being that number that is frequently attached to a TEST or some PERIOD OF PROBATION)

So you may remember that Jesus when Jesus was feeling starved was tempted by Satan to hastily extricate himself out of the hunger and turn the stones into bread. And so Jesus said to him:

(Matthew 4 verse 4) "It is written: '**Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.**'"

- You see the lesson here in **Exodus 16** is **not merely about BREAD**
- it is **not even JUST ABOUT the necessity of the DAILY PATTERN** in order to be able to contend effectively against our deeply ingrained tendency to not really learn anything unless we learn it over and over on a very regular basis

You see that the **MANNA** - that "**Bread from heaven**" (as **Exodus 16** calls it) is really **another OT signpost** to something else that is the "**TRUE BREAD**" **THAT COMES DOWN FROM HEAVEN.**

Now you don't need to take my word for that because Jesus has a conversation with a crowd of people that have been eagerly hunting him down after the feeding of the 5,000.

What I'm going to do is simply pick up the conversation there at:

**John chapter 6 and verse 25ff** So we read: "When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

<sup>26</sup>Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. <sup>27</sup>Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

<sup>28</sup> Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"

<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

<sup>30</sup> So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?" <sup>31</sup> Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

<sup>32</sup> Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

<sup>34</sup> "Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread."

<sup>35</sup> Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. <sup>36</sup> But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe.

## CONCLUSION

**So here's the question this morning**, especially if you are trying to get your head round Christianity - **Q. Do you believe?**

Is Jesus really THE MANNA SENT BY GOD FROM HEAVEN TO SUPPLY ALL OUR NEEDS UNTO ETERNAL LIFE?

If the court is still out on that question, then I would suggest that your grumbling and base level DISSATISFACTION will not go away any time soon.

If you are a believer and you recognise your need to come to God and His word on a DAILY BASIS doing the work required to collect and prepare all that He sends - **Q. Are you evidencing the reality of that?**

### I want to lead us in a prayer:

- maybe right now you are SO UNHAPPY - it has been such a long time since you were last knowing a deep CONTENTMENT

And Jesus is telling you:

"I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe."

Well take this opportunity to break through - what exactly are you waiting for?

Don't keep Him waiting any longer.

Receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour - tell Him that you need what He did on the cross for you - yield once and for all your life to Him.

- maybe you are already His and yet you're still UNHAPPY, DISCONTENTED 9 days out of 10 - well realise that you need to avail yourself of HIS BREAD NOT JUST ONCE A WEEK but EVERY DAY and FIRST THING.

Ask the Lord to forgive your neglect and ask Him to help you adopt that DAILY RHYTHM, to take in that wonderful DAILY MANNA that is still, even today on the menu.

Lord thankyou for your word - thankyou for your daily goodness - may we ever be satisfied in you. AMEN