

September 15 Lesson 3 (NIV)

FAITHFUL DURING UNCERTAINTY

DEVOTIONAL READING: 2 Corinthians 8:9–15

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Exodus 16

EXODUS 16:1–15

¹The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. ²In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. ³The Israelites said to them, “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.”

⁴Then 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. ⁵On 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.”

⁶So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, ⁷and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?” ⁸Moses also said, “You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD.”

⁹Then Moses told Aaron, “Say to the entire Israelite community, ‘Come before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.’ ”

¹⁰While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud.

¹¹The LORD said to Moses, ¹²“I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.’ ”

¹³That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. ¹⁵When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was.

Moses said to them, “It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat.”

KEY VERSE

When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat.”—Exodus 16:15

RESPONDING TO GOD’S GRACE

Unit 1: God Is Faithful

LESSONS 1–5

LESSON OUTLINE

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 - A. Between Elim and Sinai (v. 1)
 - B. Against Moses and Aaron (vv. 2, 3)
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- II. The Lord’s Answer (EXODUS 16:4–8)
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 - B. Relayed to the People (vv. 6–8)
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Spun yarn and Spindrift

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HOW TO SAY IT

Aaron *Air-un*.

Elim *Ee-lim*.

mannaman-uh.

Moses *Mo-zes* or *Mo-zez*.

Pharaoh *Fair-o* or *Fay-roe*.

quailkwayle.

ShurShur.

Sinai*Sigh*-nye or *Sigh*-nay-eye.

Introduction

A. Held from Heaven

A group of botanists traveled to the Alps to search for rare specimens of flowers. At one point they came across a beautiful flower down on a rock ledge that they could not reach. They saw a shepherd boy not far away, so they called him over and offered him some money if he would allow himself to be let down by them with a rope in order to get the flower.

The boy wanted very much to earn the money. He looked down at the ledge. Then he looked at the strange men—and he said no. They offered him a little more money, and he was tempted to say yes.

Still, he wasn't sure about trusting those strangers. Then all of a sudden his eyes lit up. "Wait here," he told them and ran off. About 10 minutes later he was back with another man. "I will get the flower for you," he told the men, "if you will let my father hold the rope."

In times of uncertainty and doubt, when we feel as if we are "at the end of our rope," we need the assurance that someone is holding the rope—or better still, holding us! David expressed his own confidence in the Lord that no matter where he might travel, on earth or in realms beyond the earth, "even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast" (Psalm 139:10).

B. Lesson Context

After the Lord had brought forth the Israelites from 400 years of bondage in Egypt, Moses told the people, "Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, because the Lord brought you out of it with a mighty hand" (Exodus 13:3). That "mighty hand" had been displayed in a series of plagues that provided clear and dramatic evidence that the Lord was superior to any of the gods of the Egyptians (chapters 7–11).

But after leaving Egypt, the Israelites forgot the Lord's "mighty hand." When they were camped by the Red Sea and saw Pharaoh and his horsemen and chariots approaching, immediately they panicked. They accused Moses of bringing them out into the wilderness to die (Exodus 14:10–13).

Moses spoke words of faith and assurance to the people, "The Lord will fight for you" (Exodus 14:14), and then proceeded to back up his words with the miraculous parting of the Red Sea (14:15–18, 21, 22). The Israelites safely crossed on dry land, after which the waters were brought back onto the Egyptians when they tried to give chase (14:23–28). Exodus 14 concludes with the statement that "the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant" (14:31).

But that trust was also short-lived. As the people came to the Desert of Shur, just east of where they had crossed the Red Sea, they traveled for three days and could find no water. When they finally did find water at Marah, they could not drink it because it was bitter. The people once more complained to Moses, whereupon the Lord once more provided for his people's needs (Exodus 15:22–25).

As they moved down the western edge of the Sinai Peninsula, the people's travels brought them to a place called Elim, where they came upon an oasis consisting of 12 wells of water and 70 palm trees (Exodus 15:27). The lesson text begins with the people's departure from Elim.

I. The People's Accusation

(EXODUS 16:1–3)

A. Between Elim and Sinai (v. 1)

1. The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt.

It is probably difficult for the Israelites to leave a place like *Elim* with its abundance of water and beautiful scenery. This is especially so given that their journey brings them *to the Desert of Sin*, located *between Elim and Sinai*. For the first time in the Bible, the name Sinai appears. It can refer to both the mountain where God will reveal himself to Israel and to the surrounding region (beginning in Exodus 19).

The names *Sin* and *Sinai* may come from the same Hebrew root, though the exact meaning of the word is uncertain. This designation Sin has nothing to do with sin as a violation of God's command, nor should it be confused with the Desert of Zin, which is an open, uncultivated region south of Palestine (Numbers 13:21; 20:1; Joshua 15:1).

Also noted is the people's arrival *on the fifteenth day of the second month* after the exodus. The exodus, along with all the miraculous demonstrations of the Lord's power both before and after it, should still be fresh in the people's minds.

B. Against Moses and Aaron (vv. 2, 3)

2. In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron.

The Israelites had *grumbled against* Moses previously at the Red Sea and at Marah (see Lesson Context; compare Exodus 16:7–9, 11, 12). Now they begin to grumble against both Moses and his brother, Aaron (see 4:14–17; 12:1, 28).

3. The Israelites said to them, "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."

One should contrast the words of the people here with the description of how they "groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help ... went up to God" (Exodus 2:23). Now, faced with the hardships of journeying through the wilderness, they see their past bondage in a whole new light: "Life was so much better in *Egypt*; we had all the food we could eat!" *Pots of meat* now seem very appealing to a discontented people whose thinking has become distorted by unbelief.

The Israelites' grumblings, however, come close to blasphemy when they express the wish that they *had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt*. That same hand had performed wonders and signs that brought the Egyptians to their knees and made them beg the Israelites to leave Egypt (Exodus 3:20; 7:5; 12:33; 13:9, 14).

Ironically, not long before this murmuring, the people had sung praises to the Lord for what the power of his "right hand" had accomplished on their behalf (Exodus 15:12). They had proclaimed that "terror and dread" would fall on other nations when they heard of the Lord's mighty works (15:16). But now fear and dread fall on God's own people as they allow their

circumstances to control their faith instead of trusting the Lord to continue to care for them as he has promised.

II. The Lord's Answer (EXODUS 16:4-8)

A. Revealed to Moses (vv. 4, 5)

4. 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.

Previously the Lord had responded to the people's cries of dissatisfaction by guiding Moses to perform a miracle that provided what the people needed (Exodus 14:15-18; 15:22-25). Here the Lord describes to Moses something that the Lord himself will do, without the need for an intercessor. The Lord will provide a response for his people in order to refute their claims that they were filled with *food* in Egypt and left to die since leaving. Bread will be given to the people, but not from wheat harvested from the ground; instead, it will come *down ... from heaven*.

The instructions for this gathering will constitute a test for the Israelites, to reveal how faithfully they will adhere to what the Lord commands them to do. The people will be responsible for going out and gathering the bread *each day*.

5. "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."

Here is a specific requirement that will test the people's willingness to obey the Lord. Nothing is said at this point about the significance of the seventh day as a sabbath day; that will come later (Exodus 16:23, 25, 26, 29). Perhaps the test of the people is in whether they will obey the Lord's instructions even when no reason is given for those instructions. Will they trust the Lord's authority enough simply to do what he says?

B. Relayed to the People (vv. 6-8)

6. So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt,

Nothing is said specifically about what *the evening* will bring that will cause the people to *know* that the Lord has *brought them out of Egypt*. The context suggests some form of miraculous provision. The people will learn that the Lord has not brought them out to kill them, as they claimed previously (Exodus 16:3), but to care for them throughout their travels.

7a. "and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD,

Though no one can see God and live (Exodus 33:20; contrast 1 John 3:2), he chooses to reveal his glory in various ways to give his people confidence. This is the first specific reference in Exodus to *the glory of the Lord* appearing to the people, though they have certainly witnessed manifestations of the Lord's power and glory through events such as the plagues and the deliverance at the Red Sea.

The Lord's glory will be more dramatically and intensely manifested at Mount Sinai when he establishes his covenant with the Israelites and calls Moses to come to him on the mountain

(Exodus 19:16–19; 20:18–21; 24:15–18). God’s glory will also fill the tabernacle when it is completed (40:34, 35).

7b. “because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?”

Even though this *grumbling* has been voiced to Moses and Aaron, in truth it is ultimately *against* the Lord. Moses and Aaron have not brought the people out of Egypt; that is God’s doing (Exodus 16:6). Moses and Aaron are only the human tools in his hands.

8. Moses also said, “You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD.”

All the bread you want is a similar phrase to what the people previously used to describe how abundantly they had been fed in Egypt (Exodus 16:3). God assures his people that no one will go hungry when he feeds them.

Once again Moses points out that the people’s complaints is directed *against the Lord*, not Moses and Aaron. Though the people think they are witnessing a failure of human leadership, Israel cannot see that the Lord is leading Moses and Aaron and has never left his people.

III. The Lord’s Presence

(EXODUS 16:9–12)

A. The People Look (vv. 9, 10)

9. Then Moses told Aaron, “Say to the entire Israelite community, ‘Come before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.’ ”

At this point, Moses instructs Aaron to have the people gather *before the Lord*. This will prepare the people for his response to their *grumbling*.

10. While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud.

The people have seen the Lord’s presence in a *cloud* previously, guiding them when they left Egypt (Exodus 13:21, 22) and protecting them from the Egyptians at the Red Sea (14:19, 20). Given their earlier complaining, it seems they have assumed that the Lord has abandoned them in *the desert*. They are wrong.

B. Moses Listens (vv. 11, 12)

11, 12. The LORD said to Moses, “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.’ ”

Now the directions previously given by Moses and Aaron to the people are backed up with divine authority (Exodus 16:4, 8). Once again the people’s *grumbling* is cited. The Lord’s providing food for the people is intended to impart the knowledge that *the Lord* is Israel’s *God*. Similar words were used previously in Exodus to highlight the impact of the Lord’s deliverance of his people on both the Israelites themselves (6:6, 7) and the Egyptians (7:5), specifically Pharaoh (7:14–17; 8:8–10). This is the same God who has brought the Israelites out of their bondage; he has not changed, and he will not abandon his people in this wilderness.

IV. The Lord's Provisions

(EXODUS 16:13–15)

A. Meat for the People (v. 13)

13. That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp.

Here the meat promised earlier by Moses (Exodus 16:8) and by the Lord (16:12) is provided in the form of *quail* (see Numbers 11:31; Psalm 78:27, 28; 105:40). The fact that the birds are found throughout *the camp* clearly indicates that there is a sufficient amount to feed the people.

Apparently, the quail come early enough in the evening that the people have time to prepare them for consumption. God has promised the people that there will be bread *in the morning* (Exodus 16:12), but when they awaken all they see is *a layer of dew* that normally appears on the ground.

B. Manna for the People (vv. 14, 15)

14, 15. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was.

Moses said to them, "It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat."

The people have never seen anything like this! And being in a desert environment, we wonder when was the last time they saw *frost*. They are at a loss for what to name the *thin flakes* because they are completely new to them. The name they finally give it, *manna*, signals this confusion since the word is from a Hebrew phrase meaning *What is it?*

Even so, there is no question regarding who provides it: only *the Lord* can distribute bread from Heaven. Later its taste is likened to "wafers made with honey" (Exodus 16:31). Perhaps the people are uncertain regarding what they are to do with this substance until Moses says, *It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat*. Psalm 78:24, 25 characterizes it as "the grain of heaven" and "the bread of angels."

Conclusion

A. Faith for Times Like These

As the children of Israel entered a desolate territory following their exodus from Egypt, they became insecure about their food supply. Despite their collective discontent and grumbling, the Lord provided unmistakable visual aids to show that he would supply for their needs. He had not "let go of the rope"—or of them.

In truth, humanity has always lived in uncertain times. Every generation has viewed its times as unsettled or perilous in one way or another. One has only to read from the words of a passage like Psalm 74 to get a sense of the author's personal anguish and frustration with God over why he does not act more quickly to rescue his people from the desperate times that surround them: "O God, why have you rejected us forever? Why does your anger smolder against the sheep of your

pasture?” (Psalm 74:1). “How long,” he pleads, “will the enemy mock you, God? Will the foe revile your name forever?” (74:10). The psalmist’s times were very uncertain!

Our times are no different; there is an abundance of turmoil in so many areas of life. We frequently express our anxiety over uncertainty much as the Israelites did: through murmurings against leadership, from the local to the national level.

The response to living in such times is to return to the truth that is the focus of today’s lesson title: God remains faithful, even during times of uncertainty. His promises remain true; his Word provides the assurance that we need—that when human hands are weak and untrustworthy, God’s hands remain strong. The aforementioned psalmist, who was so distraught by the chaos around him, came back to this truth himself: “But God is my King from long ago; he brings salvation on the earth” (74:12).

David acknowledged, “My times are in your hands” (Psalm 31:15). So are ours.

B. Prayer

Father, in troubled and uncertain times, may we turn ever and only to you. We thank you that you remain our rock and our refuge—help us remember that! May our hearts be untroubled and find peace from this assurance. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

In uncertain times, God certainly remembers his promises.¹

¹