

QUAILS AND MANNA

Exodus 16

In review, the institution of the Passover should be mentioned in all classes because of the frequent recurrence of this feast in the Old Testament story and its importance in the story of the Lord's life on earth in the Gospels. The crossing of the Red Sea should also be mentioned, and the pupils should be reminded how the children of Israel were led on their long journey.

Doctrinal Points

What reformation is.

The difficulty of getting rid of the unregenerate life.

Why we need to read the Word and pray every day.

Notes for Parents

If you have been studying these notes consecutively, you will have freshly in mind the wonderful stories of the Passover feast, the crossing of the Red Sea, the sweetening of the bitter waters of Marah, and the period of rest which was given to the children of Israel at the oasis of Elim.

The Lord had performed one miracle after another for the Israelites, and still in our lesson for today we find them complaining and looking back longingly at the "flesh pots" of Egypt. Have you ever known a woman who was very much dissatisfied with the house in which she was living and finally succeeded in moving to another house, only to begin complaining about new inconveniences and recalling only the things she had liked in the old house? Aren't we all pretty much like that? What is hard in our immediate present is apt to fill our minds and crowd out the acknowledgment of the Lord's constant goodness to us. "When you feel like complaining, count your blessings" is an old and wise

saying. We are all less grateful to the Lord than we should be, and He deals gently with us, as He did with the Israelites.

The beautiful story of the quails and manna teaches us something we need always to remember. If we look to the Lord and trust Him, He will give us each day our daily bread—not just food for our bodies but food for our souls, the wisdom and strength to meet our daily problems and temptations. But we must gather this spiritual food each day by reading the Word and by prayer. We cannot gather enough of it in church on Sunday to last all week. We should go to church on Sunday to worship the Lord and to thank Him for the blessings we have received during the week. The church is the Lord’s house, and there all our own immediate concerns, all our likes and dislikes, all our worldly cares and anxieties should be laid aside for a short time while we “rest in the Lord.” It is this spirit of worship and thanksgiving which alone can make the sabbath a day of rest. The other days of the week are the days of trial and temptation when we need a fresh supply of strength from the Lord, and He has provided it for us in His Word. It is there for our gathering each day. As the Psalmist calls it (Psalm 78:25), it is truly “angels’ food.”*

Primary

The reading of the lesson from the Word should lead to a discussion of how the Lord feeds all of us, and the connection should be made with the petition in the Lord’s Prayer. Discuss the nature of the manna, the reason for its name, the instructions for gathering it, and the length of time during which it was provided for the people.

When Pharaoh finally agreed to let the children of Israel leave Egypt, they gathered together all their possessions and their cattle and left as quickly as they could. Just before they left they had a feast which the Lord had commanded them to hold to celebrate their being set free by Him. They were told to have the same feast

*Swedenborg, following Schmidius, renders this “bread of the mighty” (AC 5490). Cf. Psalm 103:20, HH 229. –Ed.

every year on that same day always so that they would never forget their deliverance, just as we celebrate Thanksgiving Day every year. They called their feast the Passover because at the time of the last of the ten plagues the angel of death had passed over their homes without injuring any of them.

On their journey back to the Holy Land they were led by the Lord during the day by means of a pillar of cloud, which became a pillar of fire at night. As long as it moved ahead of them, they were to follow it; and when it stopped, they were to stop and camp. Moses was their leader.

When they came to the Red Sea, the Lord parted the waters for them so that they crossed on dry land, and when they could not find water that was good to drink, the Lord showed them how to make the water good.

Wouldn't you think that by this time the children of Israel would have been glad to trust the Lord and obey Him?

But people have a way of forgetting how good the Lord has been to them.

Instead of this goodness what did the people soon begin to remember?

How did the Lord satisfy their hunger for meat?

What did He give them for bread?

Manna means "what is it?"

How often did they find the manna?

At what time of day did they find it?

How much was each person to gather?

An omer is a Hebrew measure equal to three or four quarts.

What happened when they tried to keep the manna overnight?

There was one exception to this.

On the sixth morning of each week they were to gather enough for two days.

This lasted them over the sabbath.

Read verse 31 of our chapter to see what the manna tasted like.

You know that it is really the Lord who gives us our food. We pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," and the Lord feeds us just as truly as He fed the children of Israel in the wilderness.

Junior

With this class the connection should be made by means of the story of the

Passover feast, emphasizing the reason for its being called the *Passover*. Give the children an opportunity to tell what they remember about the crossing of the Red Sea, the bitter waters of Marah, and the oasis at Elim. In the lesson for today the general correspondence of the manna can be given them. Stress the connection with the Lord's Prayer.

What Christian sacrament did the Lord institute at His last Passover?

After the first Passover the people started in haste on their journey. Moses and Aaron were their leaders, but the Lord gave them another guide also—a pillar of cloud in the daytime and of fire at night—which they were to follow, stopping whenever it stopped and going on when it moved. You remember the story of how the Red Sea was parted by a miracle so that they could cross on foot, and how the Egyptians tried to pursue them and were drowned when the waters closed again.

Then the children of Israel began their journey through the “wilderness”—the Sinai Peninsula. In *The Sower* we read the following about the country through which they passed: “Sand hills were on their right between them and the sea, and higher rocky hills made a wall upon their left. There were few clouds to shade the sky, and the sun even in spring was very hot. There were also at this season scorching southeast winds full of stifling dust. Rain falls in that country in the winter, but it makes a sudden flood and soon the brook beds are almost dry again.” So they found little water and no food, and soon they began again to complain and to blame Moses for taking them out of Egypt. Do you remember what the angels told Lot when they led him out of Sodom, and what happened to Lot's wife? If you do not remember this story, you may read it in Genesis 19:17-26. We all have a tendency, whenever we are called upon to bear any present trouble, to remember only the pleasures we used to have and to forget the difficulties and dangers.

Our lesson for today is about how the Lord fed the children of Israel on their journey.

What did they long for especially?

What kind of meat did the Lord give them?

We are also told in *The Sower* that quails do not normally live in that country, but that in the spring great flocks of them pass over, migrating from their winter home in Africa, and that since they are not strong fliers they go with the wind and often have to settle down to rest. You may be interested to read in Numbers 11:18-20, 31-34 of a time when the Lord again sent quails and what happened to the people because they ate too greedily.

But there was another food which they missed perhaps even more than meat. Bread, as you know, is made from flour of various kinds, and of course the people could not very well grow grain while they were traveling through the wilderness.

At what time of day were the quails sent?

What did they find in the morning?

What did Moses tell them this bread was?

What was it called? *Manna* means “what is it?”

How often were they to gather it?

How much were they to gather?

An omer is about three or four quarts.

When were they not to gather it?

How were they fed on the sabbath?

What happened to the manna which they tried to keep on other days?

What did the manna look like?

How did it taste?

Look up Numbers 11:7-8 and see how they prepared it for eating. In Psalm 78:25 the manna is called “angels’ food.” The children of Israel were fed with the manna all through the rest of their forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Read Joshua 5:10-12 to see how the manna stopped as soon as they reached the Holy Land and were able to find grain again. Although the giving of the manna was of course a miracle, we know that all our daily food really comes to us from the Lord. Men cultivate and prepare it, but they do not make the seeds or the fish and birds and animals.

And there is a deeper lesson in our story which you are old enough to understand. The manna is a picture of another kind of food which the Lord will always give us if we ask Him for it—food for our souls. And we have to gather this kind of manna day by

day also and to use it while it is fresh. Can we eat enough at one meal or on one day to last us all week? Some people think that if they go to church on Sunday, they can forget the Lord and do as they please all the rest of the week. That is like trying to keep the manna over. We need to read a little from the Bible every day, to think about the Lord, and to pray for enough goodness to meet the temptations which will come to us on that day. That is what we really mean when we say, “Give us this day our daily bread.”

Intermediate

The correspondence of the quail and especially of the manna and the directions for its gathering make a simple, practical lesson for this class. It should be covered briefly enough so that time may be left for at least the statement of the doctrine of repentance, reformation, and regeneration which is involved in the beginning of the wilderness journey.

You will remember the institution of the Passover feast at the time of the tenth plague, and how the children of Israel were commanded to eat it girded for their journey, and how the Lord put in the hearts of their Egyptian neighbors to give them “jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment” to help them on their way. You remember also the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea and the first two stops on the farther side, when at Marah they were taught how to make the bitter waters sweet, and were rested and refreshed at the oasis of Elim. And you remember that they were being led by the pillar of cloud and fire.

From Elim they were led southward parallel to the sea, with sandy hills between them and the sea and higher rocky hills to their left. It was a dry and desolate way, and they began to complain and look back longingly to the “flesh pots” of Egypt. It does not take very much hardship sometimes to make us forget our blessings and our trust in the Lord.

But the Lord is indeed “long-suffering and plenteous in mercy.” He promised Moses that He would give the people “in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full.” You may remember from the first chapter in Genesis that evening pictures

a state of waning intelligence and love; and the morning, the dawning of a new understanding. The Lord stands ready to give us the food our souls need in both these states: the quail—the pleasure we get from being praised and thanked for doing right—in our evening states, and the manna—true inward happiness in doing right—with each new beginning of spiritual progress.

The whole story of the manna is a beautiful study in correspondence. The manna came with the dew in the morning. Genuine good from the Lord, which is our spiritual bread, comes as we try to learn and apply particular truths from the Word. In Psalm 78, verse 25, the manna is called “angels’ food,” and Swedenborg tells us that it actually was angels’ food given a material substance so that it might nourish the Israelites, just as divine good has to be embodied for us in concrete acts. The Israelites called it *manna*, which means “what is it?” People do not know what is meant by spiritual good until they have actually tasted it. Spiritual good—which Swedenborg calls the “good of truth”—is a heartfelt delight in practicing the truths we learn from the Word.

The manna had to be gathered every day and in quantity only sufficient for that day’s eating. In the Lord’s Prayer we say, “Give us this day our daily bread.” We cannot absorb enough goodness on Sunday to last us all week any more than we can eat enough at one meal to support our bodies all week. Our spiritual strength must be maintained by daily reading of the Word and prayer, and anything we learn and do not use becomes worthless, just as the manna when kept over “bred worms, and stank.” Yet the Lord also gives us our sabbaths, regularly recurring states of rest and peace in which we may enjoy what we have already gathered without the conscious effort to gain more.

The children of Israel were fed with the manna for the whole forty years of the wilderness journey, and it ceased when they entered the land of Canaan; for it pictures especially the spiritual food we need while we are struggling with temptations. We should keep in mind that the wilderness journey of the Israelites pictures the period of “reformation.”

You know perhaps that some churches believe that one becomes a Christian and is “saved” by a single religious experience called *conversion*, in which he recognizes that his life has not been good, turns to the Lord and acknowledges Him as his Savior, and expresses his intention of being a Christian. This is not the New Church teaching. Conversion is necessary, but it is only the first step of the way. The word *convert* means to “turn with,” in religion to turn in the direction of the Lord. We know that we are all born with strong tendencies to selfishness and that, if we are to be followers of the Lord, we must at some time—as early in our lives as possible—of our own free choice turn away from self and toward the Lord. In the Bible history of the Israelites, we recognize that their remaining in Egypt after Joseph’s death was a yielding to self-indulgence. Their decision to obey the Lord and leave Egypt may be likened to conversion. It was the first necessary step on their way back to the Holy Land. But they had a long, long way to go before they reached their destination, and many trials and hardships to pass through.

In the teachings of our church we often hear this series of words: *repentance*, *reformation*, and *regeneration*. When we really see that we are selfish, are sorry, and determine to change our lives, we repent. When we persist in the effort to put selfishness aside and obey the Lord, we gradually “reform” our lives; that is, we make them over from the selfish pattern in which we have been living into the order in which the Lord would have us live. This is not done in a moment. We often become discouraged and rebellious and slip back. But if we ask the Lord’s help and go on again, there comes a time when we find that living in the Lord’s way gives us happiness; we have learned to love it. We have entered the Holy Land, which is a picture of regeneration. Regeneration means being *born again*. We have become new people, children of our heavenly Father.

Basic Correspondences

quails = natural satisfactions
from “being good”

manna = spiritual good or the “good of truth”—genuine happiness in being good

Senior

The important lesson for this class is the difference between the New Church doctrine of salvation and that of other churches. The story for the day can then be presented to emphasize our need of looking to the Lord daily for the strength to meet the problems of the day and to overcome its temptations.

We are studying the meaning of the wilderness journey, that part of our spiritual development which lies between the state of living for self and the world and the state called “regeneration.” Egypt under the Pharaoh of Moses’ time represents, as we have seen, a state in which our higher possibilities are enslaved by selfishness and worldliness. Moses represents the law of the Lord, which should be our leader. The plagues were permitted not only to convince Pharaoh that he must let the children of Israel go, but also to convince the children of Israel that they must not stay in Egypt any longer and that Moses was actually the representative of the God of their fathers. If we are ever to get to heaven—represented by the Holy Land—we must come to a point where we see for ourselves that the merely worldly life is slavery.

The Passover feast, which the children of Israel celebrated on the eve of their departure from Egypt, symbolizes the decision to break off the bondage of natural and worldly desires and thoughts and be led by the Lord. This decision marks the beginning of the period called reformation, for before we can even enter the border of the Holy Land of spiritual living, we must put our external lives in order according to the Lord’s laws. The journey of the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan represents this period of reformation. Its first great event was the crossing of the Red Sea, the first practical test of the new determination, the first temptation met and overcome, confirming the decision.

After this first victory the children of Israel were led by the pillar of cloud and fire down the east side of the sea on their way

to Sinai. At Marah the Lord showed them how to make the bitter waters sweet for their drinking, and at Elim, “where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees,” He gave them a period of rest and refreshment.

The New Church does not teach—as some churches do—that a person can be “saved” by the single religious experience called *conversion*. One must indeed be converted, that is, turned from the way of self and toward the way of the Lord; but that is only the first step. The way to salvation is a lifelong spiritual journey in which we meet our problems and temptations one after another, sometimes enjoying victory and sometimes slipping back and being defeated, often discouraged and rebellious, but with the Lord’s guidance and help, advancing little by little toward our true goal.

Between Elim and Sinai lay the wilderness of Sin—*Sin* or *Zin* being the Hebrew word meaning “clay.” It was a dry, hot, dusty stretch of country, picturing the way a life of obedience to the Lord often appears to us in the early stages of our journey. It was at this point that the quails and manna were sent. The quails represent external satisfactions in doing good; an example of these would perhaps be our pleasure in the approbation of people whom we love and respect when they see us earnestly trying to overcome our bad habits. But this kind of satisfaction is only a temporary support; the quails were not sent regularly. We need something more, and the Lord gives it to us. The giving of the manna is a wonderful and beautiful story. No one can go on steadfastly through the temptations of this period of reformation unless he has more than external results to uphold him. The manna represents spiritual good. Swedenborg calls it “the good of truth, which is the life of the spiritual man.” When the children of Israel first saw it, they said, “What is it?”

We all say this at first about spiritual thinking and living; they seem unreal and remote from any kind of pleasure we have experienced. Yet the manna sustained the children of Israel throughout their whole journey. It is a taste of genuine happiness in the effort to serve the Lord. We are to gather it daily, early in the morning.

The morning, of course, means at the beginning of each new state. At first the dew lay upon the ground. Each new state begins with the reception of some fresh truth. Then comes the manna, the inner satisfaction which nourishes and strengthens the soul. And “when the sun waxed hot, it melted.” This fresh satisfaction disappears as the new state is put to the test through temptations; yet it has given strength to endure through them. We pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” It is the heavenly manna, the “angels’ food” of the Psalmist (Psalm 78:25), for which we are really praying. We should literally look for this food every morning by reading the Word and praying if we wish to be sustained in the right way through the work of the day. We must gauge the amount of our reading according to our needs, for if we go on beyond the limit of eager and reverent interest, what we read will lose its power to feed us and will even give us a distaste for it, just as the manna which was kept over “bred worms, and stank.” The fact that the children of Israel were not to gather the manna on the sabbath does not teach that we should not read the Word and look to the Lord on Sunday, but that in the holy states of peace and rest after victory, which the sabbath represents, we are sustained without conscious effort on our part. We advance in our reformation a step at a time; our spiritual food is given us “line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little,” until we reach the promised land of spiritual abundance.

Adult

The most obvious topics for discussion are the relationship of reformation to regeneration and the progression from natural delight to spiritual good, as pictured by the quails and manna. The latter discussion will be helped by pointing out the contrast offered by the story of the second sending of the quails in Numbers 11. Note also the complaint of the people in Numbers 21:5 just before the plague of fiery serpents.

The wilderness journey of the Israelites pictures, as we know, the period of reformation. This, as the writings frequently tell us, is the state in which we make ourselves do what we know we

should do, not because we love to do it but simply because it is commanded by the Lord. There is much of self in this obedience.

The final plague not only convinced Pharaoh that he must let the children of Israel go, but also convinced the Israelites that they must break their Egyptian bondage at all costs and start at once for their true home in Canaan. The Passover feast, celebrated then for the first time, was to be repeated annually to remind them of their deliverance, just as the Lord at His last Passover feast on earth instituted the Holy Supper and commanded His disciples, “This do in remembrance of me.” When we take the Holy Supper, we pray that it may be to us “the sign and seal” that we are the Lord’s children. The decision to leave Egypt represents the decision which everyone who is to be regenerated must make of his own free will sooner or later: the decision to turn his back on worldliness and self-indulgence and to set his face toward the achievement of spiritual life. This decision is the essential first step, but it is only the beginning.

We may remember from an earlier lesson on creation Swedenborg’s statement in AC 13 in connection with men’s progress toward regeneration: “The greatest part at this day attain only the first state; some only the second; others the third, fourth, or fifth; few the sixth; and scarcely anyone the seventh.” Regeneration is a lifelong process. This should not discourage us. It should rather lead us to look upon each day we are granted in this world as an opportunity to grow a little further toward the angelic stature which is possible for us. We know that the process of growth is not continuous. The wilderness story is a pictur  of the temptations, failures, hardships, and rebellions which attend our efforts to bring even our outward lives into order. And after the children of Israel reached the Holy Land there were still wars, backslidings, and defeats. But the story is also a picture of the wonderful way in which the Lord leads and supports us, accommodating His providence to our changing states, and giving us victories and times of rest and refreshment for our encouragement all along the way.

Our story for today illustrates this constant presence and provi-

dence of the Lord. The children of Israel had come into a state in which they were looking back with longing at the external enjoyments which they had left behind, and forgetting the hardships of the bondage from which they had escaped. The Lord did not permit this state to lead to an actual turning back. He sent a new type of food to satisfy their craving for the “flesh pots” of Egypt.

Again we are reminded of the Creation story in which each day is described as advancing from evening to morning. In giving us the correspondence of the quail and manna in AC 8426² Swedenborg writes:

That “in the evening” denotes the end of a former state, is because the changes of state in the other life are circumstanced as are the times of day in the world, namely, morning, noon, evening, and night, or twilight, and again morning. Be it known that in the spiritual world there are perpetual changes of state, and that all who are there pass through them. The reason is that they may be continually succeeding one another in order like the times of the day and the times of the year, never return quite the same, but are varied. The beginning of every state corresponds to morning on the earth, and also in the Word is sometimes meant by “morning”; but the end of every state corresponds to evening, and is likewise sometimes called “evening” in the Word. When it is morning they are in love; when it is noon, they are in light or in truth; but when it is evening they are in obscurity as to truths, and are in the delight of natural love. This delight is what is signified by the quail which they received in the evening, and the good is what is signified by the manna which they received every morning.

In our story the quail represent “natural delight through which is good.” When we are not yet in states in which we can feel unselfish happiness in truth and goodness, we are permitted to feel satisfaction of a natural kind—that is, satisfaction in which there is a sense of self-merit—in doing right, because this encourages us to continue in the right path. We should compare this story, however, with the story in Numbers 11:10-23, 31-34, in which the quail were again sent and the result was disastrous because the people ate too greedily. We cannot safely remain long in any delight which smacks of self-righteousness. So our story

shows us how divine providence leads us day by day, meeting our changing states with the kind of spiritual food which we can receive, and strengthening us to continue. We see immediately the connection between the instructions for gathering the manna and our daily petition, “Give us this day our daily bread.” We cannot gather enough spiritual food on Sunday morning to last us all week. We need to go to the Word and pray daily, because we change from day to day and the problems of each day are different from those of the day before.

The manna which came down with the dew in the morning represents “the good of truth in its first formation.” A helpful discussion of this is found in AC 8462 with reference to the people’s calling the new gift from the Lord “manna”: “That this signifies amazement at what was not known, is evident from the fact that the word ‘manna’ in its own tongue means *What?* thus, that which is not known. That from this the bread that was given to the sons of Israel in the wilderness was called ‘manna,’ is because this bread signifies the good of charity that is begotten through the truth of faith. Before regeneration this good is quite unknown to man, and it is not even known that it exists.”

In an addition to the memorable relation in TCR 695, which we find in *Posthumous Theological Works*, Vol. 1, p. 152 (also in Document 302 of Tafel’s *Documents Concerning Swedenborg*), we read: “I told them further that they should know that the miracles which are recorded in the Word likewise took place by an influx out of the prior into the posterior world, and that they were produced by an introduction of such things as are in the spiritual world in corresponding things in the natural world; e.g. that the manna which every morning descended upon the camp of the children of Israel, was produced by bread from heaven being introduced into the recipient vessels of nature; that in like manner bread and fishes were thus introduced into the baskets of the apostles, which they distributed to so many thousands of men; again, that wine out of heaven was instilled into the water in the pots at the wedding where the Lord was present; further, that the

fig-tree withered, because there was no longer any influx into it of spiritual nutriment, by which it was fed from the roots.” So we see that the manna was actually, as it is called in Psalm 78:25, “angels’ food.”

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia. n. 8452: “*That the quail came up*. That this signifies natural delight through which is good, is evident from the signification of ‘quail,’ as being natural delight. That the ‘quail’ denotes natural delight is because it was a bird of the sea, and by a bird of the sea is signified what is natural, and by its flesh, which was longed for, is signified delight . . . That it also denotes through which is good, is because it was given in the evening. For when in the other life there is a state which corresponds to evening, then good spirits, and also angels, are remitted into the state of the natural affections in which they had been when in the world, consequently into the delights of their natural man. The reason is that good may come out of it, that is, that they may thereby be perfected. All are perfected by the implantation of faith and charity in the external or natural man; for unless these are implanted, good and truth cannot flow in from the internal or spiritual man, that is, from the Lord through this man, because there is no reception; and if there is no reception, the influx is stopped and perishes, nay, the internal man also is closed. From this it is plain that the natural must be brought into a state of accommodation, in order that it may be a receptacle. This is effected by means of delights; for the goods that belong to the natural man are called delights, because they are felt.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. What feast did the Israelites hold just before they left Egypt? *Passover*
- P. How were they to be led on their journey? *pillar of cloud/fire*
- J. How did the Lord help them at the Red Sea? *parted water*
- P. What complaint did they make when they reached the wilderness of Sin?
no meat
- P. What did the Lord send them in the evening? *quails*
- P. What did they find on the ground in the morning? *morsels of “bread”*
- P. What did they call it? *manna*
- J. What does *manna* mean? *“what is it?”*
- J. What directions did the Lord give them for gathering it? *one omer each daily*

- J. What happened when some of the people disobeyed? *it spoiled*
- J. How were they fed on the sabbath? *double amount on sixth day*
- P. How long did the Lord feed the children of Israel with the manna?
forty years
- P. Of what petition in the Lord's Prayer does this lesson remind us?
... our daily bread
- I. What does the journey of the Israelites through the wilderness picture?
reformation
- S. What do the quails represent? *external satisfaction from doing good*
- S. What does the manna represent? *spiritual goodness which comes from the Lord as we try to learn and live truths from the Word*