

The Bread of Life

Manna was daily and appears it provided for whatever need or taste the children of Israel in the wilderness may have had - Joseph Benson Commentary reads that the Jews make this claim. F.R. Young in the Biblical Illustrator writes, "it was according to their wants - appetites." Matthew Henry writes, "It was pleasant food; the Jews say that it was palatable to all, however varied their tastes."

It was sweet, and it was also wholesome, sustaining them, it appears, for a whole day, but it didn't last beyond that. It had to be collected daily and eaten all or thrown out daily. What was gathered was good for that day and no more. Further, it had to be gathered in the morning before the 'heat' of the day. Before the sun dictated the day's activities; before the day took on a life of its own. If they waited too long, it would melt away and disappear just as opportunity does when neglected.

Exodus 16:31 (KJV) And the house of Israel called the name thereof Manna: and it *was* like coriander seed, white; and the taste of it *was* like wafers *made* with honey.

This word used to describe it was no accident. It tasted like the promise of God! "A land flowing with milk and HONEY." Manna was a daily reminder that though they were in the wilderness, God had not forgotten them and that His promises were still abiding with them.

Manna was miraculous. Shewbread, while holy, was not.

The Shewbread was *made*. It was made without leaven, seasoned with frankincense, kept in display on the table of shewbread in the holy place until the 7th day. But in addition to that, it was seasoned with frankincense, which made it sweet to smell, but also bitter to the taste if it was eaten.

We can rationally conclude it was without leaven as John Gill, D.D. points out: It was 'shew' bread or bread of faces; meaning before God's face. Therefore, we can also presume it would be unacceptable with leaven to lay before God's face for seven days. Further, it lasted six days before being eaten - leavened bread would be sour by then, just as the manna was in one day.

Now, if the manna represented the miraculous daily provision by God for His people based on their individual needs, desires and relationship with him, then the shewbread carefully crafted by the priesthood represented something else.

The manna represents the daily devotions of the individual, reading of the Word and prayer. It is sweet, just what you want and need, there everyday, provided without *any* effort on the part of the ministry...and only lasts *one* day. This was gathered and eaten in their individual homes. If we wait until the 'heat of the day' our opportunity often evaporates for this time of 'sweet' fellowship. It often feels rushed, forced or just duty if we allow the day to crowd out this opportunity.

Manna is best gathered before the sun has fully risen, the house has stirred to enlivened activity, before the children or the family create a whirlwind of distracting activity. Manna-gathering is designed to be a *morning* activity.

Lamentations 3:23-24 (KJV) *They are new every morning:* great *is* thy faithfulness. **24** The LORD *is* my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.

(That being said, the same sweet quietude can often be accomplished in the latter hours of the day when the home has grown quiet once again.)

The shewbread was by careful preparation, intense labor - each loaf using 1 gallon (biblehub.com) of fine flour (Lev 24:5), precise measurements (Encyclopaedia Judaica 2/10's of an ephah [calculation shows 5 gallons/22 liters]) of proper and prescribed ingredients, made by the priesthood specifically for the Sabbath day. It was 'seasoned' with frankincense placed upon the loaf in a pile by specific measurement (prayers), which lingered even when eaten to scent the bread and perhaps remind the eater of its aromatic and healing properties but slightly bitter taste. It is also to remind us that the Word and prayer still go together. Most say the frankincense was taken or scraped off the bread and burned during or direction after the eating of the bread *in the house of God*. The bread, uncorrupted, lasted 6 full days and was still good. Prayer when made, prayer while waiting, prayer during, and prayer after.

The raw wheat kernel of fine flour represents the process of **labor**, **suffering** and **standards**. No shewbread came about without these elements. It didn't just appear - it was a lengthy process from planting, to growth, to harvest, to threshing, to grinding, to baking and then to being consumed. The fire which baked it represented the trials and tests upon that which suffered. The frankincense, as stated above, represented prayer or offering to God a sweet-smelling savor - no shewbread or offering of shewbread could be complete or accepted by God without prayer.

Manna was the bread that God made. Shewbread was the bread that the PRIESTS made...it was still holy to God, but it didn't "fall out of the sky". It had to be made through prescription and labor,, with the same ingredients and same process...each time! Fine flour from wheat. Ground between stones and probably ground again, or perhaps again. It took a while - it was 'fine' flour.

Man's efforts were accepted only because it was done by his prescribed method and it lay before God to absorb the holiness of His Presence - else it was just bread. It had to be accepted and sanctioned by God to be holy.

It doesn't take much depth of thought to see the manna was a daily walk with God of the people and the shewbread was the symbolic of the preached Word of God. Each Divinely appointed, each with wholesome and sustaining properties, but different methods of production. Manna literally fell from the sky - God did it. Shewbread required the priesthood and men's labors. Counterintuitively, the bread that God gave directly to the people only lasted one day. It was sweet, filling, satisfying and fleeting. The bread that God directed the priesthood to make was bland, quite large (approximately 6+ lbs of dough), slightly bitter, but lasting and good for a solid week.

As with manna, in a few minutes (more than *just a few*) of honest prayer, a family or an individual can gather enough to sustain them throughout the day.

Yet, anointed, life-changing preaching, acceptable to God, cannot be produced the same way. It is labor, it is sweat, it is proper ingredients, it is seasoned with the fragrance of prayer and the bitterness of soul. It must endure the heat of the oven. It is intense at times, as it often is ground perhaps once, twice or even three times and it took longer, but the results as so much farther reaching!

On the power of sustaining bread, consider the example of the bread baked by the angel while Elijah was running from Jezebel.

1 Kings 19:7-8 (KJV) And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise *and* eat; because the journey *is* too great for thee. **8** And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.

Consider God's plan and wisdom in dealing with His people.

It can't all be the unleavened shewbread, else there is no sweetness of relationship, no *personal* miracle of 'just what I needed today'.

It can't all be sweet breads or nice prayers once every few days. The old bread will stink tomorrow. It is good for one day, but it sure makes that day SO MUCH BETTER!

The Bread has to both be daily by God and weekly by the ministry. It takes both that which seems to taste bitter, but has the properties of healing and the fragrance that pleases God. Both the sweet and the unleavened.

God is a God of the short-term and the long term. He knows our frame and supplies the sweet moments of walking with Him in life and the less dramatic, but more sustaining moments that keep us in the running.

Not all bread is created equal, but both types of bread are necessary.

Something wonderful happened in Jesus.

John 6:32-35 (KJV) Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. **33** For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. **34** Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. **35** And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

He became both! Both the sweet and the strengthening. Both the daily and the sustaining. Both the pleasant and the deeply holy and spiritual. Jesus Christ is that wonderful BREAD OF LIFE!!

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