

**Foundational Stories Series**  
**“Hoarding Stinks” OR “On Learning to Trust God's Provision”**  
**Sermon on Exodus 16:2-21 (10/4 & 10/5/14)**  
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Well, friends, guess what? This is the thirteenth and final sermon in our *Foundational Stories* sermon series. After three months of sermons on stories from Genesis and Exodus – the first two books in the Bible – we are moving on. Kind of. We're still going to be in Exodus for much of October and November...but the actual sermon series will be different.

So, for what will probably be the last time, let's recap what's happened over the course of this fairly lengthy *Foundational Stories* series.

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In Genesis chapter one – “in the beginning” – God created the heavens and the earth.

Then, quite a few chapters later, a guy named Abraham, along with his wife Sarah, came onto the biblical scene. God took a liking to Abraham...and God invited Abraham to follow. Abraham said “yes” to God, and then God promised Abraham three very important things: the land we now call Israel...many descendants...and blessing – that not only would Abraham's descendants *be* blessed, but that the world would be blessed through them.

This three-fold promise between God and Abraham is called “The Abrahamic Covenant” and it is *the* foundational promise of the entire Bible. It is the promise that formed the Israelite people – whom we usually refer to as the *Jewish* people today – and, as Christians, it is the foundational promise of our own Savior, Jesus Christ, who was himself an Israelite.

As Christians, we believe that Jesus reinterpreted this foundational promise through his own life, death, and resurrection. But, it is still important for us to know and to understand this promise as we do our own exploration of the Holy Bible. So: land, descendants, and blessing. That was the foundational promise by God to the Israelites.

And, over these last three months, we've met many of Abraham's early descendants – many of the earliest Israelites – including Isaac and Rebekah, Esau and Jacob, Jacob's family...all the way down the ancestral line to Moses and the many, many other Israelites about whom we just read in Exodus 16.

The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt for generations but, things got very bad for them. So, under the leadership of Moses, they made their escape from slavery and began what the Bible says was a 40-year journey in the wilderness toward their Promised Land.

In addition to being quite lengthy, this journey from slavery to freedom included a significant pitfall very early on when they encountered the Red Sea. Last week we experienced the story of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea – the story of how God enabled Moses to part the waters so the people could walk through the sea on dry land.

The story of the crossing of the Red Sea was a story about God helping the Israelites through a significant obstacle. More than that, however, it was a story of true deliverance.

See, the Red Sea was a problem simply because it was in the way. It was an even bigger problem because the Egyptian army was trying to get their slaves back...and, when the Israelites reached the Red Sea – all of them on foot, no less – the Egyptians were not far behind...and on horseback or in chariots.

After God allowed the Israelites to cross the Red Sea to safety, the Egyptians also began to cross. Before they reached the other side, however, the walls of the sea crashed in and drowned the Egyptians. The Israelites were safe. God had delivered them...and there was *much* rejoicing.

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In the early 1990's, a pastor named Daniel Erlander wrote a little book called *Manna and Mercy*, which is a short, creative re-telling of the entire Bible – from Genesis all the way through to Revelation.

After his re-telling of the Creation story in Genesis, Erlander begins the story of the Israelites and how they became God's chosen people, the people meant to teach the world what it means to be *partners* with God – loving God, loving each other, and loving the world. Kind of like the third part of that foundational, three-fold promise: being blessed by God to then be a blessing to the world.

I'm going to take a bit of time to read to you from Daniel Erlander's *Manna and Mercy* because one of the sections of the book focuses really well on the Israelites' early time after escaping slavery in Egypt.

As I read this, keep in mind that Daniel Erlander often refers to God with the Hebrew name “Yahweh.” Daniel Erlander also refers to the Israelites' time in the wilderness as their “Wilderness School,” a time of learning what it meant to be God's people, blessed to be a blessing. So, after his telling of the Red Sea story, Erlander writes this:<sup>1</sup>

“God felt like a mother who had birthed a child. Indeed God had brought forth a child – a people who, because of this exodus, would live as Yahweh's very own, a chosen people – PARTNERS with God!

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<sup>1</sup> Erlander, Daniel. *Manna and Mercy*. Mercer Island, WA: The Order of Saints Martin and Theresa, 1992. 5-9, selections.

“Yahweh thought and thought, 'Now that I have birthed a people, what shall I do with them? What shall I do?' Yahweh thought of a wonderful plan:

“...I will tenderly raise this child-people. I will teach them how to live as mature partners with me ... The nations of the world will notice how these people live. They will see how joyful life can be. Tired of war, oppression, and greed, they will ask these people to teach them how to live ... Through these people I will teach all nations to live as partners with me ... [So Yahweh] went to work on the plan.

“God's first step was to lead the child-people into the wilderness. This precarious land would become God's classroom, the place where the people would learn how to live...

“When would the wilderness instruction begin? God the teacher waited and waited for the teachable moment, a moment which came when the people grumbled about food. Yahweh responded by showering them with some edible substance called 'What is it?' or 'manna.' [The Hebrew word for 'manna' literally means 'What is it?']

“The way God gave the manna, and the way the people gathered it and shared it, taught the people how to live as a special people on this earth.”

According to Daniel Erlander's understanding of the story, the first major lesson the people learned in their Wilderness School was that “God gives manna for all.” And, within that major lesson, were several smaller lessons:

God was the one who provided the manna each day...from that, they learned all food is God's. Well, actually, *everything* is God's and we can trust God for our daily bread.

Another smaller lesson was, in Erlander's words, that “Work is the dignified activity of helping God meet the needs of all people.” God provided the manna from heaven, but the people had to go out and gather it. However, they were only supposed to gather as much as was necessary for their particular family: Larger clans gathered more, and smaller clans gathered less.” So, again, the first, major lesson the Israelites learned in their Wilderness School, was that “God gives manna for all.”

Or, more simply put, the first lesson of life in the wilderness was that *God provides*.

Erlander continues his version of today's story saying, “God taught the second [major] lesson when some of the people decided to hoard manna ... Their hoarded manna grew maggots and spoiled.”

So, the second major lesson the people learned in Wilderness School was that hoarding stinks. God had told the people not to collect more manna than they needed – that enough would be provided for them each day...yet some failed to trust, or they simply wanted more than they needed.

Their hoarded manna started to stink...to rot...there were even maggots. Disgusting, right? And all because they couldn't trust God to provide what they needed...and they couldn't trust that what was provided was, in fact, enough.

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The story of the Israelites' exodus out of Egypt was filled with wonder and glory on God's part, as well as complaints and whining on the peoples' part.

After they escaped slavery, they complained about leaving Egypt when the Egyptian army began to follow them...as if slavery had been so great. So God saved them through the Red Sea. Then, not long after God delivered them through the Red Sea – just before today's story begins – the people complained about bad-tasting water in the desert...so God sweetened the water.

Then the people complained about how they didn't have enough to eat...so God sent the manna in the morning, as well as quail in the evening. And *still* the people didn't trust: some of them wanted more than they needed...some of them worried they wouldn't have enough.

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As I reflected on this passage this past week, I couldn't help but think to myself, “Just how much does God need to give these people before they learn to trust that they will have enough and that God is with them and that God is *for* them? When will they stop complaining to God???”

But, as I complained against the ancient Israelites...I found myself feeling like a bit of a hypocrite. Because, as I became frustrated with the doubts and the complaints of the Israelites – as I became frustrated with their lack of trust in God's provision – I was reminded that, all too often, I am just like them.

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So often it's hard for us to trust God's provision – that it will be enough, that it will come *when* we need it, that it will be *what* we need.

I love how Daniel Erlander uses the “Wilderness School” concept in *Manna and Mercy*. The 40 years the Israelites spent on their journey between Egypt and Canaan truly was a time of learning.

This group of people was free for the first time in generations. They were no longer living under someone else's control. They had to learn what it meant to be free...*together* – as a people called to bless others.

And the first thing they needed to learn – the first thing they needed to get very clear in their heads – was that they were *God's* people.

They were not a bunch of individuals living for themselves. They belonged to God. And they needed to learn to trust that God was *with* them and that God was *for* them.

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The distance between Egypt and Israel is about 230 miles. Even on foot, this is really not that far. Don't get me wrong, I would not want to walk it with my extended family...but, even with a very conservative estimate of walking five miles a day, it should have only taken the Israelites about a month-and-a-half to get to the Promised Land.

Yet, according to the book of Exodus, it took them forty loooooong years to walk those 230 miles. Maybe they got lost a few hundred times (they didn't have GPS back then)...maybe biblical timing is recorded differently than we would record it today.

Or maybe they took that long because that was how long it took them to learn the lessons of "the wilderness school."

Maybe that was how long it took them to learn to trust in God and to learn what it means to be God's people. Because learning those things is very often a lifetime's worth of spiritual education...don't you think?

I'm 36 and God knows I'm still learning what it means to trust in God's provision... what it means to trust that God will provide *what* I need, *when* I need it, and that what God provides will be enough. I'm still learning that. How about you all? Do you have that lesson all figured out yet?

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Today [Tomorrow] is World Communion Sunday, a day when Christians from all corners of the globe – from all parts of Christianity's family tree, all denominations, all races and cultures – a day when we all come together around Christ's Communion table, to share in the holiest of meals.

Holy Communion is one of the best ways God provides for us...and, in this holy meal, we are reminded of our interconnectedness...we are reminded of our call to care for others the way God cares for us...we are reminded that differences between us do not matter because we are *all* beloved children of God.

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When the Israelites were in their Wilderness School, they learned to leave for others some of what God gave them – they learned to *share* in God's provision. What a perfect opportunity we have this weekend of World Communion celebration to be reminded of that same Wilderness School lesson.

The Israelites had been blessed by God to be blessing to the world: being generous and sharing with others is a huge part of what it means to bless the world. As followers of Jesus Christ – Jesus, who was himself an Israelite – we have inherited this same blessing...and we have inherited this same call to bless the world

So, as we share in the meal of our Lord and Savior, may we give thanks for God's provision...may this meal lead us to share that provision with others...and may God continue to teach us to trust, this day and always. Amen.