

THE BREAD OF LIFE

INTRODUCTION

I once was very sick from food poisoning, and was in a wretched state all through the night. Not being able to sleep, I prayed and asked if there was any spiritual lesson to be learned from such a thing. The revelation I believe I had was that in the same way one can poison one's own physical body through eating the wrong physical food, so also one can poison one's spirit through eating the wrong spiritual food. From this point I began to pay more attention to the reality of spiritual food, and I could see the evidence manifested in other ways. For instance, a fast can be wearying and exhausting, but once serious time is spent in communion with God, one feels re-energized and sustained. Or conversely, if one does not feed on the right things spiritually but becomes lethargic and lazy, spiritual strength can ebb away. The truth of this is also painted on a larger, corporate scale, in regards to what the bodies of believers are feeding on, or allowing themselves to be fed, often in place of true bread. Now the substance of this truth, as with all truth, is the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the true Bread from Heaven. The intent of this article is simply to examine the scriptures and draw out this symbol of food, or bread, to our edification.

CHRIST IS THE TRUE MANNA

The first time we encounter a type of heavenly bread in the scriptures is in the story of the exodus, when the people of Israel were fed manna in the wilderness by the divine hand:

And when the layer of dew lifted, there, on the surface of the wilderness, was a small round substance, as fine as frost on the ground.¹⁵ So when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was.

And Moses said to them, "This is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat.¹⁶ This is the thing which the LORD has commanded: 'Let every man gather it according to each one's need, one omer for each person, according to the number of persons; let every man take for those who are in his tent.'"

¹⁷ Then the children of Israel did so and gathered, some more, some less.¹⁸ So when they measured it by omers, he who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack. Every man had gathered according to each one's need.¹⁹ And Moses said, "Let no one leave any of it till morning." (Exodus 16:14-19)

It is relevant to note that this manna had to be gathered daily, and it was all that the people were to eat:

And the children of Israel ate manna forty years, until they came to an inhabited land; they ate manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan. (Exodus 16:35)

As we know, in the sixth chapter of the fourth gospel, Jesus Christ showed Himself to be the antitype of this heavenly bread. He had just fed the five thousand the previous day, and now He

had a lengthy discourse with the Jews regarding the bread from heaven. Having rebuked them for laboring for the wrong bread and seeking Him because they were filled physically, rather than because they recognized Him as the true Bread of Life, He goes on to establish that the manna in the wilderness pointed to Him all along:

³⁰ Therefore they said to Him, “What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do? ³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”^[d]

³² Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

³⁴ Then they said to Him, “Lord, give us this bread always.”

³⁵ And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. (John 6:30-35)

In the same way that we draw the nutrients from food and nourish our bodies with the substance of the physical bread, we are also sustained spiritually by the true Bread of Heaven, Jesus Christ. And this heavenly bread causes us to be nourished and filled up in our spirit by the substance of that which He is.....*life!*

⁵⁰ This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.” (John 6:50-51)

And again:

This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.” (John 6:58)

The natural always serves as a shadow of the spiritual, and thus we find that even as Israel came out of the wilderness and ate manna for forty years before reaching the promised land, so we also feed on Jesus Christ upon coming out of the world, being sustained by Him on our long sojourn to the fulfillment of our upward call as sons of the Most High.

IN CHRIST WE ARE ONE BREAD

In Paul’s first letter to the church at Corinth, we find that we are not only one body in the Lord, but also *one bread*:

¹⁶ The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? ¹⁷ For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread. (1 Corinthians 10:16-17)

Jesus said He came as the bread from heaven to give life to the world. As His body and as one bread, we also give this life to the world. This being said, we can only give life that we have

received, and though the church, by feeding on Jesus Christ as the true bread, should be within ourselves more and more conformed to that same life-giving bread, in so many cases the churches are feeding on the wrong food.

⁴ Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: “Who will give us meat to eat?”⁵ We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; ⁶ but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!” (Numbers 11:4-6)

Just as the Israelites grumbled against having nothing to eat but manna, and cried out for flesh, so the churches eventually grow weary of feeding on Jesus Christ alone, and seek to add to Him the works of the flesh. From being the sole source of spiritual sustenance, Christ is relegated to simply being the main course, and from there He becomes mere condiments, and ultimately He is no longer any part of the diet, though His name is on everybody’s lips as if He is present. Thus the journey is made from feeding the flock the Bread of Life from the table of God, to feasting on the abominations of the flesh, though all the time thinking it is still nutritious spiritual food being consumed.

¹⁷ But they sinned even more against Him
By rebelling against the Most High in the wilderness.

¹⁸ And they tested God in their heart
By asking for the food of their fancy.

¹⁹ Yes, they spoke against God:
They said, “Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?”

²⁰ Behold, He struck the rock,
So that the waters gushed out,
And the streams overflowed.
Can He give bread also?
Can He provide meat for His people?”

²¹ Therefore the LORD heard this and was furious;
So a fire was kindled against Jacob,

And anger also came up against Israel,
²² Because they did not believe in God,
And did not trust in His salvation.

²³ Yet He had commanded the clouds above,
And opened the doors of heaven,

²⁴ Had rained down manna on them to eat,
And given them of the bread of heaven.

²⁵ Men ate angels’ food;
He sent them food to the full. (Psalm 78:17-25)

I once saw a symbol of this years ago when I was in a Christian bookstore. There was a prominent display case featuring ‘The Essential Christian Family Library’, a collection of books deemed indispensable to the Godly household (or at least marketed as such). I scanned through

the rows of books, and to my increasing bewilderment, I finally confirmed that there was *no Bible!* Now of course, the scriptures themselves can be but dead letters without the illumination of the Spirit, but this struck me as such a powerful metaphor – man constructing an essential library of words about God, without God’s own words present!

²⁶ Jesus answered them and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. ²⁷ Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.” (John 6:26-27)

The call to the elders of the people is to feed the flock faithfully, which means feeding them Jesus Christ as the true manna. When we erect our own man made ministries to please the flesh, we end up unwittingly laboring for the food which perishes, and all things temporal. Listen to God’s rebuke of the unfaithful shepherds in the book of Ezekiel:

‘Thus says the Lord GOD to the shepherds: “Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? ³ You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. ⁴ The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them. (Ezekiel 34:2-4)

We have an amazing prophetic picture here of a people being starved – and surely in our day and age there are many flocks that are being starved of the true Bread! If I may be permitted to draw another parallel, it is like the father of an earthly household leaving on a journey, and committing the provisions to the older brothers for distribution throughout the home. But instead of faithfully feeding each member the true food, the brothers cook up their own monstrosities and poisonous fare to serve, or else refuse to feed their brethren altogether! Instead of feeding the flock, they feed upon the flock, and become fat at the expense of the sheep.

GOD WILL FEED HIS PEOPLE

In His faithfulness and kindness, the Lord never allows His people to be led too far astray or fed amiss for too long. The time comes when He delivers His people from the unfaithful shepherds, and feeds them directly, having removed the hirelings that did not care for the flock:

¹⁰ Thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand; I will cause them to cease feeding the sheep, and the shepherds shall feed themselves no more; for I will deliver My flock from their mouths, that they may no longer be food for them.” (Ezekiel 34:10)

In an era of church history (like so many others) where the true Bread has been replaced and the household of God given abominations to eat, surely Christ is leading many out to new pastures, and feeding His chosen people directly by His own hand, with no interference - edifying, sustaining , and building us up for our destiny of possessing the fullness of Christ:

¹⁵ **You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger,
And brought them water out of the rock for their thirst,
And told them to go in to possess the land
Which You had sworn to give them. (Nehemiah 9:15)**

We must commune with the Lord to be full of the Lord, and we must have learned to eat the Bread of Heaven before we presume to feed the brethren. And if we are to go in and “possess the land”, we must eat the food which God provides, even Christ – not turning back remorsefully towards the food of Egypt, nor crying out for flesh to be added to our daily bread, but instead content to gather our manna as long as it is called today, pressing forward towards the prize with eyes full of the vision of Jesus Christ our Lord.

To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. (Revelation 2:17)

CONCLUSION

The flesh of Jesus Christ is real food, and His blood is real drink. In Christ God has provided for our spiritual provision and sustenance through all the ages - an inexhaustible field of barley and a bottomless well of life giving water. Nevertheless, the temptation arises to leave the divine daily food and go after flesh, adding the works of the flesh to the simplicity of Christ. This short article is written so that we might contemplate and feed upon the true Bread, and having fed on this Bread, be spiritually strengthened to feed the flock of God, and ultimately the whole world, which Jesus Christ is more than enough to fill:

He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things... (Ephesians 4:10)

... So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained. (Matthew 14:20)

Amen!