Sabbath School.

BIBLE LESSONS.

Lesson 8.—August 21.

Exod. 16: 1-8.

THE MANNA.

GOLDEN TEXT.

Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.—John 6: 32.

TOPIC.—Deliverance from Hunger.

DAILY READINGS—Monday, Exod. 16: 1-8. Tuesday, 1 Kings 17: 8-13. Wednesday, Psa. 51: 1-10. Thursday, Matt. 15: 29-39. Friday, John 6: 47-58. Saturday, 1 Kings 19; 1-10. Sunday, 1 Cor. 10: 1-11.

NOTES BY TALBOT W. CHAMBERS, D.D.

Vs. 1.—*From Elim*, which means "trees" is usually considered to have been what is now called *Wady Gharandel*, a very pleasant valley abounding in trees and water. When I was there in 1874, I counted more than seventy palm-trees, and found the springs numerous, offering a very pleasant contrast to the region traversed before and after reaching this halting-place. *Wilderness of Sin.* The children of Israel, after spending some weeks in the oasis of Elim, with its bright waters and abundant trees and shrubs, set out again on their march, and came to the wilderness (that is, uncultivated country, which is all that the word usually means in Scripture) called Sin,—a proper name of obscure derivation, but bearing no relation whatever to the English word of the same letters. This "wilderness" is usually identified with the sandy plain of *El Murkha*, which extends along the coast of the Red Sea, and is a very bare and desolate region. Other places in the peninsula have been supposed to represent this "wilderness," but the determination of the point belongs rather to biblical geography than to exegesis. The meaning and bearing of the narrative are the same, whatever view we take of the place where the events occurred. *The fifteenth day.* This precise statement of date indicates an account drawn up at the time.

Vs. 2.—*The whole congregation.* It would seem that by this time the supplies brought from Egypt had been exhausted. The region of the wanderings, although there is good reason to believe that it was much more productive than it is now or has been for many centuries, still was manifestly unfit to support so large a number suddenly added to its population. The Israelites, however, instead of resorting to God in prayer, began to murmur. The feeling was so general that it is ascribed to the whole body. *Against Moses and Aaron.* Confronted, as they thought, with the prospect of starvation, they reproached Moses and Aaron as the authors of the calamity, although, we shall see (v. 8), the reproach went a great deal farther.

Vs. 3.—Here we have the exact words of the murmurs. *Would to God.* The Hebrew is literally, "who will give;" that is, "Oh that." The insertion of the divine name is due to the translator. "Died by the hand of the Lord in Egypt:" That is, had suffered an immediate and violent death there rather than be left to perish here by the lingering agony of starvation. The awful fate of the first-born in Egypt seemed preferable to that which impended over them now. *The flesh pots . . . bread to the full.* These words show that the servile labors to which they had been subjected did not involve stinted supplies of food. They were fed abundantly, either by the officials of Pharaoh or by the resources of their own fruitful region in Goshen. *To kill this whole assembly.* A cruel charge, but people prone to murmur are not in the habit of weighing their words.

Vs. 4.—*I will rain bread from heaven.* The words mark from the outset the strictly supernatural character of the supply. Attempts have often been made to explain this as simply an unusual quantity of the natural manna still found in the peninsula of Sinai,—a sweet juice which exudes from the trunk and branches of the *tarfa*, a sort of tamarisk, in warm weather, and in the form of small globules falls down upon the leaves and branches below, whence it is gathered in the morning. But the differences are great. That which God sent from heaven was picked up not simply under trees, but anywhere. The quantity gathered in a single day was more than the whole annual supply of the natural manna. The supply ceased on the Sabbath day. It became offensive if kept over one day. It could be ground and baked so as to serve the purpose of bread instead of being merely a medicine or a condiment. There is therefore, no reason to doubt that the words of Moses are to be taken literally, and God made a miraculous provision for the needs of the people. *A certain rate every day.* In the margin, "the portion of a day in his day; that is, a daily portion every day. No supply in advance, but simply daily bread. *That I may prove them.* Put to the test their patience, faith, gratitude, and obedience. There was a constant probation of Israel during the whole period of this heaven-sent food. *Whether they will walk in my laws, or no.* The first trial of this kind is given in a subsequent portion of this chapter. The people were bidden to collect only what was needed for present wants, and were expressly forbidden to retain any over till the next day,—the object being to keep them sensible of their constant dependence upon the divine bounty. But, notwithstanding, some of them, unwilling to trust the Lord, attempted to preserve a portion to the second day. But, we are told, it bred worms, and became offensive. They did not walk in Jehovah's law, and suffered in consequence.

Vs. 5.—*On the sixth day.* On this day the people were to gather twice as much as on any other day. Why? Because it was the sabbath (v. 23). This circumstance proves to any unprejudiced mind that the seventh day was previously known to the people as a day separate from all others, because set apart for rest and worship. Otherwise it seems impossible to account for the giving of the command, or for the way in which it was received. Nor can any account of this fact be suggested that is so reasonable as that which supposes it to be the memorial of the ancient institution in the Garden of Eden when God blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it; that is, set it apart for sacred uses. It is quite possible that under the pressure of heathen taskmasters in the house of bondage the day may have lost some of its sacredness, or fallen into partial neglect—and that with a view to counteract this unfortunate degeneration God was pleased to make this arrangement in regard to the manna. As a work of necessity, sabbath gathering would have been allowable, but this made the divine regard for the day the more noticeable.

Vs. 6.—*Moses and Aaron said.* Having of course, been previously informed of the Lord's purpose. *At even.* The interposition by which the people would have a substitute for the regretted "flesh-pots" of Egypt was to take place at the the close of the day, as the corresponding one in regard to bread was to occur at its opening. *Ye shall know that the Lord.* They would learn it in the most thorough manner. They seemed now to ascribe their desolate condition to Moses and Aaron, and to charge them with wickedness and folly; they would soon see that God was the author of the exodus. The miracle of the flesh is like that of the manna. The latter was a miraculously increased and improved supply of that which already existed; so the former took a well-known bird, not at all rare in that region, and brought it to the camp at such time and in such quantity as indicated a special providence. With the quails covering the camp just at the period foretold, Israel learned that it was the Lord that had brought them out of Egypt, and was still their guide and benefactor.

Vs. 7.—*In the morning.* That immediately following the evening mentioned in the previous verse. *The glory of the Lord.* This evidently refers to the manifestation mentioned in verse 10, when a dazzling brightness, bursting through the pillar of cloud, proclaimed the immediate presence of Jehovah (compare 40: 34 and Num. 14: 10). Yet the parallelism with the mention of "even" in the verse preceding seems to indicate at least a subordinate reference to the first appearance of the manna after the dew had evaporated. The abundant supply of wholesome, nutritious food thus conveniently placed within reach of all was a vivid expression of the "glory" of Him for whom nothing is too hard. *For that he heareth.* The reason of the divine manifestation was that the people's murmurings were really directed against him, and he in his long-suffering, mercy and love would give them another proof of his power and faithfulness, and show them the unreasonablness of their impatience and unbelief. *And what are we*, etc. Jehovah has taken the case in hand, for we are only the executors of his will. All that we have done has been done in obedience to the divine directions, and therefore your murmurs have gone beyond us and reached him in whose name we act.

Vs. 8.—This verse as it stands in the common version is obscure, and in the Hebrew is difficult. It may be rendered thus: "And Moses said, Since Jehovah shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; since Jehovah heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him, what then are we? Your murmurings are not against us, but against Jehovah." The verse, therefore, is simply an expansion and confirmation of what was stated in the preceding verse. You thought that you were merely bringing a charge against Aaron and myself for rashness and folly in taking you out of Egypt and exposing you to the perils of starvation in the wilderness. But the Lord will presently show you in the most convincing manner that we have no authority except such as is delegated and ministerial. He will take upon himself the whole responsibility of bringing you into the peril in which you are now, and also of the deliverance from that peril. *Your murmurings are against us.* That is, according to a common Hebrew idiom, not so much against us as against the Lord. The design of the seeming redundance of assertion is to bring out more emphatically the truth—often, alas! illustrated in Israel's subsequent history—that murmuring against their leaders implied a distrust of the divine mission of those leaders, and so assailed the truth and honor of Jehovah himself. The principle, of course, admits of a wide application. When men murmur at, or reproach any of God's ministers or people for what they do in obedience to an express command, it is not so much the mere human minister as it is the divine Author of the command that is assailed.

The manna is set forth by our Lord himself as a type of his relation to his people. "I am the bread of life." The point of resemblance between the bread that perished of the old economy, and the living bread of the new, are many and striking, but even the statement of them does not belong here. Only one cannot omit the sharp contrast our Lord presented more than once to the Jews of his day. "Your fathers did eat the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which cometh down out of heaven that a man may eat thereof, and not die" (John 6: 49, 50).

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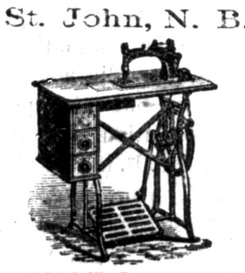

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