

Exodus 16:22-30

"Gathering Manna Before the Sabbath"

"Now on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, then he said to them, 'This is what the LORD meant: Tomorrow is a sabbath observance, a holy sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning.' So they put it aside until morning, as Moses had ordered, and it did not become foul nor was there any worm in it. Moses said, 'Eat it today, for today is a sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, *the sabbath*, there will be none.' It came about on the seventh day that some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. Then the LORD said to Moses, 'How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My instructions? See, the LORD has given you the sabbath; therefore He gives you bread for two days on the sixth day. Remain every man in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.' So the people rested on the seventh day."

The first explicit mention of the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* (שַׁבָּת) in the Torah, appears in conjunction with the giving of the manna to the Ancient Israelites (Exodus 16:11-15) and the specific instructions involving the collection of the manna as the intended, daily food for the population (Exodus 16:16-19). Moses directed how the Israelites were permitted to take one *omer* per person, per each tent in the camp (Exodus 16:16). The people had enough provision for the day (Exodus 16:18), until they could collect the manna again the following morning (Exodus 16:19). Not all observed what Moses had said, as the old manna from the previous day would have worms and be foul (Exodus 16:20), when it would be time to replenish the supply. It is noted how manna was to be collected "morning by morning, every man as much as he should eat; but when the sun grew hot, it would melt" (Exodus 16:21).

The overarching issue present in this narrative of the Torah, is how the Lord told Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction" (Exodus 16:4). Not all in the population of Israel, would pay attention to Moses' direction in collecting the manna (Exodus 16:19-20, 28). Frequently among examiners, this scene is associated with the later word of Deuteronomy 8:3, "He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD" (Deuteronomy 8:3). Likewise to be considered should be the Messiah's own declarations, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven...I am the bread that came down out of heaven" (John 6:32, 41).

Collecting the manna was to be a daily part of Israel's routine in their desert sojourn. Yet for the sixth day of the week, with the Sabbath to follow, it is stated how twice as much manna was to be collected (Exodus 16:22). What is important about Moses' direction to the Israelites does not just concern what it communicates to readers about pre-Sabbath preparation activities, but also how within the narrative of the Torah, *Shabbat* has just been mentioned prior to the formal delivery of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8-11). With the exception of the Divine rest of Genesis 2:1-3, there has been no mention of a formal Sabbath.

In evaluating the significance of the Sabbath for the people of God today, what does the Sabbath appearing in this scene communicate? A Jewish commentator like Nahum M. Sarna generally concludes, "Divine abstention from creativity on the seventh day is the climax of the biblical cosmogony, as recounted in Genesis 2:1-3. For this, the Hebrew stem *sh-b-t* [שָׁבַת] is used in its verbal form, with God as the subject. Now, for the first time, the noun *shabbat* [שַׁבָּת] occurs to

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designate the fixed institution that recurs with cyclic regularity.”¹ Noting Exodus 16:4-5, 26-30, Messianic Jewish writer Jeffrey Enoch Feinberg inquires in his *Walk Exodus* resource, “The decalog commands that Yisra’el kept Shabbat holy; but Yisra’el hasn’t reached Sinai and the commandments have not yet been given (Ex. 20:8-11). Explain why God is teaching Shabbat rest.”² Indeed, how are readers and examiners to account for the presence of the seventh-day Sabbath in Exodus 16:22-30?

16:22a On the sixth day of the week, with the seventh to follow, the Israelites “gathered a double portion of bread, two *omers* for each” (Alter). As a measurement, an *omer* (עֹמֶר) is defined by *CHALOT* to be “a measure of grain (approx. 2 liters or quarts).”³ The *ArtScroll Chumash* notes it to be “the volume of 43.2 average-sized eggs,”⁴ with The Message actually having “four quarts.” A double portion was to be collected on the sixth day of the week, so there would be sufficient food for the Sabbath, which notably would not spoil (v. 24) unlike other days of the week. Walter Brueggemann actually describes this in terms of a contradiction how what was prohibited for previous days, was permitted for the Sabbath:

“A special practice is permitted....on the sixth day in order to provide food for the sabbath day, which follows (vv. 22-26). What is permitted for the sake of the sabbath directly contradicts what is prohibited for all the other days. What cannot be carried over from one day to the next is now carried over to the day of sabbath. The sabbath authorizes storing up bread, because when designed for sabbath, the extra bread does not reflect either anxiety or greed.”⁵

The Jewish tradition of having two loaves of bread present at the *kiddush* (קִדּוּשׁ), is based on the Exodus 16:22 instruction of Ancient Israel collecting a double portion of manna for the sixth and seventh days (b.*Berachot* 39b⁶; b.*Shabbat* 117b⁷).

16:22b-24 Within the record of the Israelites having gathered a double portion of manna on the sixth day, it is detailed, “when all the chieftains of the community came and told Moses, he said to them, “This is what the LORD meant: Tomorrow is a day of rest, a holy sabbath of the LORD. Bake what you would bake and boil what you would boil; and all that is left put aside to be kept until morning”” (vs. 22b-23, NJPS). Unlike previous days of the week, on the sixth day with the seventh day or Sabbath to follow, that which was left over from the sixth day could be stored. Further instruction regarding the preparation of the manna is given in Numbers 11:8.⁸

Moses directs the Israelite leaders, *Shabbaton Shabbat-qodesh l’ADONAI machar* (קָדֵשׁ לַיהוָה בַּמָּחָר) - שַׁבְּתוֹן שַׁבָּת, “tomorrow is a Sabbath/Ceasing, a Sabbath of Holiness for YHWH” (Fox).⁹ Two terms actually appear to describe this weekly occurrence: *Shabbaton* (שַׁבְּתוֹן), “sabbath observance, sabbatism” (*BDB*),¹⁰ which can also be employed in contexts involving High Sabbaths (Leviticus 16:31; 23:24, 32, 39), as well as *Shabbat* (שַׁבָּת), designating the seventh day of the week or weekly Sabbath. As the Keter Crown Bible put it, “Tomorrow is a day of total rest, a holy Sabbath of the LORD.” The real issue for sure is not the stylistic variance of how one may render *Shabbaton Shabbat* in v. 23, **but rather how the Sabbath is being discussed before the formal giving of the Ten Commandments.**

¹ Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 90.

² Jeffrey Enoch Feinberg, *Walk Exodus: A Messianic Jewish Devotional Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Lederer, 1999), 75.

³ *CHALOT*, 277.

⁴ Scherman, *Chumash*, 387.

⁵ Walter Brueggemann, “The Book of Exodus,” in Leander E. Keck, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 814.

⁶ “Said R. Abba, ‘And on the Sabbath one is liable to break bread using two loaves. What is the scriptural basis? “Double bread” (Exo. 16:22) is what is written” (b.*Berachot* 39b; *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*).

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⁸ “The people would go about and gather *it* and grind *it* between two millstones or beat *it* in the mortar, and boil *it* in the pot and make cakes with it; and its taste was as the taste of cakes baked with oil” (Numbers 11:8).

⁹ Everett Fox, trans., *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 349.

¹⁰ *BDB*, 992.

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Is the Sabbath in this narrative somehow being projected back from the formal giving of the Ten Commandments, by either Moses or his scribes in their writing of the Pentateuch? Or, might readers be witnessing how with Ancient Israel now free from the Egyptians, that instructions which would be formally codified, have already begun to circulate among the population of Israel, as the people begin to establish themselves as a society? Exodus commentators have offered various thoughts on the presence of the Sabbath in v. 23. Representing a very general opinion is Walter C. Kaiser, who draws out the presence of the seven-day week in Genesis, and notes a pre-Israelite origin for the Sabbath-principle, at least:

"The day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord, did not originate with the Sinaitic legislation; for even in 20:8-11 it was founded in the ordinances of Creation (Gen 2:2-3). Genesis 29:27 knows of a bridal 'week' of seven days in Jacob's time (though a heptad symbolic of seven years). Many compare this ordinance to the Babylonian *šapattu*. But no one has been able to demonstrate that Israel borrowed her concept of the Sabbath from Babylon: the correspondences are just too weak."¹¹

In his *Pentateuch & Haftorahs*, J.H. Hertz mentions how the community of Ancient Israel and their Patriarchal ancestors, must have carried with them the Genesis traditions of Creation, and with them how God rested on the seventh day:

"The seventh day must have been known to the people as a special day, distinct from the other days of the week. The children of the Patriarchs had brought with them to Egypt the tradition that God had completed His work of creation in six days, and that He had sanctified the seventh day. At Mt. Sinai, therefore, the children of Israel are bidden..."¹²

More liberal examiners of Exodus, adhering to the JEDP documentary hypothesis, will be inclined to think that the material about the Sabbath originated from the so-called J source or Yahwist,¹³ and with it the religious traditions of the Southern Kingdom. Even with some source critical presuppositions, though, the observations of Brevard S. Childs—focusing more on the text in its final form—should not go overlooked:

"[O]ne [cannot] seriously imagine that the Old Testament tradition derived all the sabbath commandments from its relation to the giving of manna. Rather, the existence of the sabbath is assumed by the writer."¹⁴

The scene of Exodus 16:22-30 asks the reader questions about both Sabbath origins, as well as Sabbath preparation and observance. When the direction concerning the double portion of manna for the sixth and seventh days was followed, it is described, "They put it away until morning, as Moses had commanded; it did not stink and there was no infestation in it" (v. 24, ATS). The obedience of the people to God's instruction was surely honored, being manifest in His faithfulness to provide food for the population of Israel on a day when they were not permitted to collect manna. J.A. Motyer appropriately concludes,

"To gather enough for the next day was neither allowed nor possible (19-20), and this arrangement was specifically a test of obedience (4). But into this scheme, the Sabbath intruded with its prohibition of work, and this meant that there could be no gathering of manna. Again, there was a command to obey (5), and the Lord who delights in an obedient people himself intervened to make obedience possible in this matter (23-24). The Lord safeguards what he has appointed."¹⁵

16:25-27 Having collected a double portion of manna for the sixth and seventh days, Moses gives explicit permission for the people to eat what was left over from the sixth day for the seventh day: "Moses said, 'Eat this food today, for today is a Sabbath day dedicated to the LORD. There will

¹¹ Walter C. Kaiser, "Exodus," in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. et. al., *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2:403.

¹² Hertz, 277.

¹³ Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), pp 135-137.

¹⁴ Brevard S. Childs, *Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), 290.

¹⁵ J.A. Motyer, *The Message of Exodus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), pp 183-184.

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be no food on the ground today” (v. 25, NLT). Terence E. Fretheim takes this to mean, “Sabbath rest stands opposed to all oppressive systems, insisting on regularly timed days of rest for all, but providing for the needs of the day. Moses tells the people to enjoy a sabbath meal (v. 25). The sabbath is a day of rest from work, not from enjoyment of what God provides.”¹⁶

Moses further enjoins, “Gather it six days, but the seventh day is the *Shabbat*—on that day there won’t be any” (v. 26, CJB). Even with there being no manna available for the people to collect on *Shabbat*, this is not to symbolize that God has abandoned the provision of His people. On the contrary, God is providing His people with a special day of rest and refreshment, when they can focus on Him.

Not all in the population of Israel heeded what Moses said, and they found that there was no manna available for them to collect on the Sabbath: “On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather bread, but they found nothing” (v. 27, Common English Bible). Ezekiel 20:10-14 may refer to this incident.¹⁷

16:28 That some people went out to collect manna on the Sabbath, is not met well by God: “HASHEM said to Moses, ‘How long will you refuse to observe My commandments and My teachings?’” (ATS). *Mitzvotai v’torotai* (מִצְוֹתַי וְתוֹרוֹתַי) appears in the CJB as “my *mitzvot* and teachings,” the TLV as “My *mitzvot* and My *Torah*,” and the Jerusalem Bible-Koren as “my commandments and my *Torot*.” Not following God’s direction in terms as something as simple as not searching for manna on the Sabbath day, is apparently endemic of much larger issues of disobedience. Childs draws our attention to how while the Sabbath is to possess joy for those who remember it, there is also a restrictive element to it, testing the people to see how obedient they will be:

“Christian commentators have traditionally stressed the joy of the early concept of the sabbath which is surely correct. But the restrictive side of the day set aside to God belongs to the same tradition and cannot be dismissed. Not all the people were enjoying the sabbath. Some were out hunting for manna. Once again, the theme of God’s testing the obedience of the people recurs...God gives them a double portion of bread, but he demands a different way of life.”¹⁸

Recognizing God’s inquiry about the Israelites not wanting to obey Him, readers of the Torah see a frequent pattern witnessed throughout their desert sojourn. Not to be dismissed is how the focus now being on Israel in the Book of Exodus, is a demonstrable shift away from the focus having been on Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Peter Enns observes, “The reference to God’s commands *for Israel* comes up quite suddenly. The focus of previous chapters has been on Pharaoh’s obedience to God’s commands, not Israel’s. But God has won the battle against Pharaoh. The Israelites are his people now, and he wastes little time reminding them of that fact. Lack of obedience will have dire consequences.”¹⁹

16:29 Two key statements are enjoined in v. 29: “Mark that the LORD has given you the sabbath; therefore He gives you two days’ food on the sixth day. Let everyone remain where he is: let no one leave his place on the seventh day” (NJPS). The Sabbath has been given by God; the Sabbath is a time when there are to be some restrictions on movement.

That the Sabbath is a special gift of God, but also a time when people observing it must trust Him, is observable from *re’u ki-ADONAI natan l’khem haShabbat* (רְאוּ כִּי־יְהוָה נָתַן לָכֶם הַשַּׁבָּת). The Lord is the One who has given His people the Sabbath, *the Sabbath comes from Him*, and so for the Israelites to transgress His direction not to go out and collect manna—which was not going to be available for them—they did not consciously realize how God would be required to provide for them on *Shabbat*.

¹⁶ Terence E. Fretheim, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Exodus* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1991), 186.

¹⁷ Sarna, *Exodus*, 90.

¹⁸ Childs, *Exodus*, pp 290-291.

¹⁹ Peter Enns, *The NIV Application Commentary: Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 327.

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Bringing together some key components of the Sabbath being given by God, and God's own rest, is Jeffrey H. Tigay in *The Jewish Study Bible*, who indicates, "Since God observes the Sabbath, He will not provide manna on the seventh day but will provide a double portion on the sixth day and Israel will observe the Sabbath as well. The Sabbath, having been 'created' in Gen. ch. 2, is first revealed to Israel here."²⁰ The statement "ADONAI has given you the *Shabbat*" (CJB) does once again, like Hertz in v. 23 preceding, raise the question of why the Sabbath is being observed by the community of Israel when it had yet to be formally given. R. Alan Cole actually states in his commentary on v. 29,

"On the basis of this, and the breach of the sabbath reported, some suggest that the Israelites had not kept the sabbath while in Egypt, but that it was by way of being a novel observance. Perhaps their condition as slaves would account for this failure to observe it, even if some such custom had been known (in embryo at least) to their patriarchal ancestors."²¹

While we cannot be dogmatic about anything, a pre-Ten Commandments Sabbatical rest, observed by the pre-Mosaic Israelites and pre-Israelite God followers, should not be dismissed.

The second important assertion of v. 29, *shevu ish tach'tayv al-yeitzei ish m'meqomo b'ynom ha'shevi'i* (שָׁבוּ אִישׁ תַּחְתֵּי אֶל-יְצֵא אִישׁ מִמְּקוֹמוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי), "stay! each place-of-him not he-may-go-out anyone from-place-of-him on-the-day-the-seventh" (Kohlenberger).²² This is taken in later Rabbinical examination as prohibiting one from walking more than 2,000 cubits on *Shabbat*,²³ often in conjunction with Numbers 35:5²⁴ and Joshua 3:4.²⁵ Even with discussions taking place regarding how far one can travel on *Shabbat* up until the First Century (cf. Acts 1:12), and even modern times,²⁶ Hertz is still correct in informing, "Traveling interrupts the rest both of man and beast, and was therefore to be avoided on the Sabbath day."²⁷

16:30 The verb *shavat* (שָׁבַת) is employed in v. 30, "The people rested [*shavat*] on the seventh day" (ATS), although lexically it would be entirely legitimate to also render v. 30 with "So the people remained inactive on the seventh day" (NJPS) or "And the people ceased from work on the seventh day" (Alter). *V'yishbetu ha'am* (וַיִּשְׁבְּתוּ הָעָם) is actually rendered by the Septuagint with, *kai esabbatisen ho laos* (καὶ ἐσαββάτισεν ὁ λαός), "And the people kept sabbath" (LXE) or "The people sabbatized" (NETS). A pre-Ten Commandments Sabbath observance (20:1-17; 34:1-5) is present within the society of Israel. As Brueggemann observes, Sabbath observance was important for the people to break away from their Egyptian-influenced patterns of being:

"Sabbath is yet another opportunity to depart economically and psychologically from Egyptian modes of social reality. The alternative in this narrative is a world of glad dependence and utter fidelity, devoid of all anxiety and threat. The conclusion of the narrative, 'So the people rested on the seventh day' (v. 30), is an affirmation that at least for this narrative Egyptian patterns of existence have been nullified."²⁸

Exodus 16:21-30 application For various readers of Exodus 16:21-30, the presence of and the reasons for a pre-Ten Commandments Sabbath, may not be totally answered. It may be an

²⁰ Jeffrey H. Tigay, "Exodus," in Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp 140-141.

²¹ R. Alan Cole, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Exodus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), pp 132-133.

²² Kohlenberger, 1:192.

²³ Hertz, 277.

²⁴ "You shall also measure outside the city on the east side two thousand cubits, and on the south side two thousand cubits, and on the west side two thousand cubits, and on the north side two thousand cubits, with the city in the center. This shall become theirs as pasture lands for the cities" (Numbers 35:5).

²⁵ "However, there shall be between you and it a distance of about 2,000 cubits by measure. Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you shall go, for you have not passed this way before" (Joshua 3:4).

²⁶ Cf. Ronald L. Eisenberg, *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), pp 134-135.

²⁷ Hertz, 277.

²⁸ Brueggemann, in *NIB*, 1:815.

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indication of how a regular Sabbatical, or proto-Sabbath if you like, was kept by pre-Mosaic Israelites and pre-Israelite God followers. Certainly by the time that the Israelites were free from Egyptian servitude, principles and patterns which would help to establish them as a society, were already being directed by leaders like Moses, which would have included the weekly Sabbath. Recognizing God's daily provision for Israel via the manna to be collected each morning, presented an excellent educational opportunity, for teaching the people how their God would provide for them on His *Shabbat*.

In lauding the importance of the Sabbath, Freitheim goes as far to say that the weekly Sabbath is given a higher importance than the formal codification of the Law that will follow, and that it is of universal significance, being rooted within God's intention for Creation:

"The people are to be mindful of a *time for rest*. They are not to gather manna on the sabbath. The sabbath rest is a recurrent theme in Exodus (see at 20:8-11 and 31:12-17; cf. 23:12; 34:12; 35:2-3). The noteworthy manner here is that it is understood to be an institution of the community quite apart from the giving of the law at Sinai. It is an aspect of God's created order. This connects with the sabbath rest that is built into the created order in Gen. 2:1-3; sabbath is part of the structures of the world as a whole, not a special day only for God's elect people. Israel's rest on this day is grounded in the creational reality (20:11; 31:17). It is presented to the people (v. 23), not as a day of worship, but as a day of solemn rest. As such, it is an integral part of their life in tune with God's creational design. This particularization of the divine will is obviously in the best interests of the creation, and hence its obedience is of utmost importance.

"The implication of this creational understanding of sabbath is that the people of God are to be committed to a day of rest even for those who are not a part of their particular community, but quite apart from any concern for worship times and places. They will no doubt want to add the dimension of worship into their own practice; their argument for a broader participation, however, is to be pursued solely in creational terms, as God's concern for proper rest for all people and animals."²⁹

Each of us, in our own remembrance of the weekly Sabbath or *Shabbat* today, can take some important cues from Exodus 16:22-30. We might not be collecting manna for two days, but we do need to conduct important preparations on the sixth day, so that the seventh day is a time of cessation from laborious activities. We might have modern transportation that can carry us more than 2,000 cubits, but modern Jewish tradition of the Conservative movement only permits travel from one's home to one's synagogue and back for *Shabbat*. The Sabbath is to be a time when we not just remember God as Creator, **but as the Creator who is faithful to provide for His own!**

²⁹ Freitheim, *Exodus*, 185.