

Manna and the Land:

Sixbert lived on only \$60 each month. With his family of nine, he struggled to afford rent and to provide for the needs of his family. After missing several rent payments, Sixbert, his wife, and their seven children were evicted from their home and became homeless.

As a husband and father myself, I can't imagine looking into the eyes of my wife and kids in that moment, feeling completely helpless, alone and uncertain.

These feelings of fear and isolation are not uncommon for millions of men and women around the globe. Around one billion people live on less than \$1.25 per day. Two billion people do not have access to a safe place to save and borrow money. And over three billion men, women and children have not heard the gospel.

« In short, I believe the answer is no. God's compassion did not stop; it changed. God's two approaches to loving his people—and a model for how we should love our neighbors—are manna and land. »

Many people living in the trenches of poverty have shared that food is unreliable and shelter is inadequate. That education is insufficient. That life can be isolating and scary.

I sometimes wonder if that's how Israel felt when God freed them from slavery in Egypt. Yes, life in Egypt was terribly hard. But life in the wilderness was terrifying. Like many of our neighbors, God's people in the wilderness felt instability and hunger and isolation.

BY **CHRIS HORST**

email: CHorst@hopeinternational.org

website: www.chris-horst.com

www.hopeinternational.org

Chris Horst is the vice president of development at HOPE International, where he employs his passion for advancing initiatives at the intersection of faith and work. Chris serves on the boards of the Denver Institute for Faith & Work and the Mile High Workshop and is a founder of dadcraft.com.



A Question of Timing

The Jewish people were freed from generations of captivity in Egypt, but they escaped not into the Promised Land, but into the barren wilderness.

Even though God performed miracle after miracle, the people of Israel did what humans are prone to do: they forgot. They forgot God's provision and complained that though they were no longer slaves, they would die in the wilderness.

« Manna provided food for the people of Israel while they were homeless and in-transition from Egypt to the Promised Land. God provided it and the people harvested it. It's easier to see God's generosity when considering manna. It's an evident miracle. Still, the Promised Land was equally miraculous. »

“Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger” Exod. 16:3 (ESV).

Now, it's easy to beat Israel up for their tone. I know I have. Their persistent fearfulness seems equally maddening and confounding. Hadn't God just deployed legions of frogs and locusts, turned river water into blood, and turned day to night? You don't think He can keep you fed?

But if we look on them more compassionately, as God absolutely did, we see them differently. These freed slaves were desperately afraid. They were isolated and homeless. They were facing a terrifying new world.

And God responds in love, “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you... and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord.” (Exod. 16:4, 6)

Manna from Heaven

Only a few verses later, we read that God comes through on His promise: “And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground... Now the house of Israel called its name *manna*. It was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.” (Exod. 16:14, 31)

« God did give his people manna. But He also gave His people land, and with the land, an invitation to put their hands to work and cultivate it, to provide for what their families needed. This, not the manna, was what God’s people longed for and prayed for—to have a place and a livelihood to call their own. And God invites us to do the same, showing us how His people should take care of our most vulnerable neighbors. »

Manna was unexplainable to those who first tasted it—and even more mysterious to read about today. But one thing we *do* know is this provision of manna was not dependent upon the efforts or attitudes of God’s people. Manna was a daily reminder of God’s unconditional love. No matter how little the Israelites trusted, no matter how far their hearts wandered, the manna kept showing up. Every morning. For decades.

But one day the manna stopped. Why? What caused God’s daily provision of bread to *stay* in heaven?

“The people of Israel ate the manna forty years until they came to a habitable land. They ate the manna till they came to the border of the land of Canaan.” (Exod. 16:35)

It wasn’t random. Nor was there was a weaning period where God provided a half-serving of manna. After providing manna six days per week for 2,080 consecutive weeks, the manna dried up. In the Book of Joshua, we read, “And the manna ceased *the day after they ate of the produce of the land*. And there was no longer manna for the people of Israel, but they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.” (Josh. 5:12) The day they tasted the fruit of the Promised Land, the manna ceased.

Did God’s compassion stop when he stopped providing the manna?

Manna and the Land

In short, I believe the answer is no. God’s compassion did not stop; it changed. God’s two approaches to loving his people—and a model for how we should love our neighbors—are manna and land.

Manna	Land
Food	Fields
Received & Harvested	Owned & Cultivated
Time-bound	Ongoing

Manna provided food for the people of Israel while they were homeless and in-transition from Egypt to the Promised Land. God provided it and the people harvested it. It’s easier to see God’s generosity when considering manna. It’s an evident miracle. Still, the Promised Land was equally miraculous.

Moses challenged the people of Israel to consider this when they enter the Promised Land: “The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders. And He brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.” (Deut. 26:1, 8–9)

God did give His people manna. But He also gave His people land, and with the land, an invitation to put their hands to work and cultivate it, to provide for what their families needed. This, not the manna, was what God’s people longed for and prayed for—to have a place and a livelihood to call their own. And God invites us to do the same, showing us *how* His people should take care of our most vulnerable neighbors.

Manna, the Land, and Us

What does “manna and Promised Land” compassion look like today?

Remember Sixbert? After his family was evicted, Sixbert joined a savings group through his local church and saved small amounts of money each week. He eventually saved up enough money to buy two piglets and started a business raising and selling pigs. Now, seven years in, Sixbert has six full-time employees and 200 pigs, along with goats, cows, sheep and hens.

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Whereas before Sixbert felt isolated, he now lives and thrives in community with others. He even serves as a deacon in his church and as the president of his savings group. When he sees others struggling in his community, he gives them some of his piglets and teaches members how to raise them. He has a dream to see poverty completely eradicated in his village.

Notice how Sixbert was the recipient of both manna and land... and how he extends manna and land to others. In God's economy, we are both recipients *and* givers of both manna *and* land.

Manna	Land
Short-term housing (for Sixbert)	Savings account, pigs (for Sixbert)
Piglets (from Sixbert)	Farming training (from Sixbert)

Sixbert remembers the love he received and he recognizes his success is not his own. He said, “the main reason I wish to give to the community in this way, by sharing a pig with my neighbors, is to help each of them move out of poverty.”

In John 6, Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” (John 6:47-51)

We believe Jesus is the perfect manna—the provision freely given from heaven for the life of the world.

In Practice

How have you received and given manna in your life?

When have you been nourished by undeserved, unmerited grace from God and from others? And, how have you extended this compassion to those around you?

How have you received and given the Promised Land in your life?

When have you experienced the joy of being able to use your gifts and abilities to work and to care for those around you? And, how have you given that same opportunity to others? 

