

# ANSWERS FROM THE BIBLE

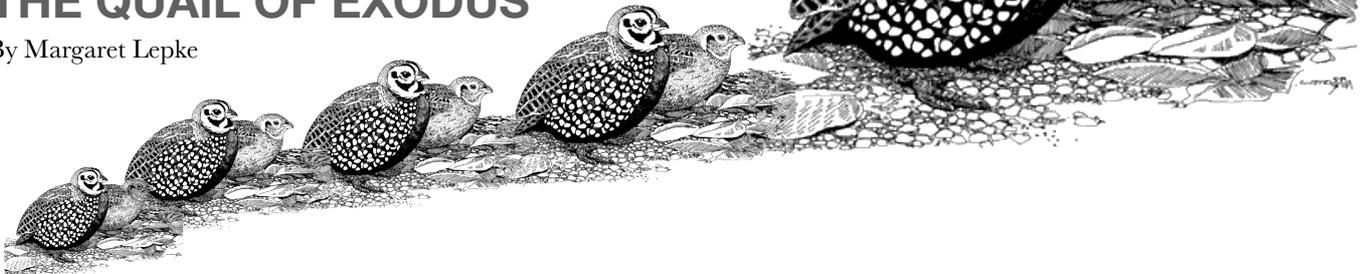
## Why did Israel yearn for meat & why did God provide quail?

This is an interesting question because Israel took great multitudes of herds and flocks with them when leaving Egypt.



### THE QUAIL OF EXODUS

By Margaret Lepke



#### Observation breeds good questions...

June, a Bible study friend of mine, recently raised the issue of quail in Exodus because she noticed that Israel took all of their herds and flocks with them when they left Egypt. She also noticed that this livestock accompanied them in the wilderness - so why yearn for meat? And when God then said 'yes' to meat, why did He supply quail instead of letting them slaughter their own sheep, goats or cattle?

**On the surface it doesn't seem important**, but on closer examination it is. Why? Because the answer brings glory to God. My own initial response had been, "Maybe the Israelites needed their animals for sacrifices, breeding and farming purposes." Not being sure, I decided to investigate and do a word study.

First, I established a timeline for the events of the Exodus to be able to see more clearly where, when and under what circumstances things happened. I have attached a helpful chart for this purpose on page 6.

Then I strategically searched Scripture for relevant words and read through all of the related chapters in Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy to establish context. The outcome was simply amazing.

I love these journeys through the Bible. They give me an ever increasing appreciation of our Almighty God, of His power, His love, and His care for His people. Conversely, I also become ever more aware of the fallibilities, selfishness and sinful behaviour of earth-bound men (and women). This particular search left me richer for the enquiry and still thinking.

## Digging for Answers in Scripture

I have quoted Scripture wherever possible (in italic, NKJV) and placed explanatory comments in text boxes.

Let's start at the beginning. Throughout the Egyptian plagues, God had kept both Israelites and their entire livestock safe from harm. Exodus chapter 10 affirms that God intended not only to lead every Israelite out of Egypt, but also every animal in their flocks (sheep and goats) and herds (oxen/cattle and possibly other farm animals). And He must have told Moses in the beginning (although there is no explicit record of this conversation) because when Pharaoh initially refused to let the animals go, Moses insisted.

Moses said to Pharaoh, *"You must give us sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God. Our livestock also shall go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind. For we must take some of them to serve the LORD our God, and even we do not know with what we must serve the LORD until we arrive there."* Ex.10: 25-26

When Pharaoh finally relented, a huge amount of people and livestock left Egypt: six hundred thousand men on foot with their children and animals. The latter amounted to *a great deal of livestock* Ex.12:38 consisting of herds of cattle and flocks of sheep and goats. Some of them would be used for sacrifices, others for the outer skin coverings of the wilderness tabernacle, and the rest most likely for breeding stock in the Promised Land.

Shortly after leaving Egypt, Israel witnessed a huge miracle: the parting of the Red Sea. They experienced the power and salvation of their God and yet, only three days into their wilderness journey, their lack of faith became obvious. There was no water, and what did they do? Instead of trusting God to provide, they complained to Moses. Moses, in turn, petitioned God, and Israel had water. Ex.15:22-27

Not long after this miracle, in fact only a little over a month later, *"the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained [again!] against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness"* Ex.16:2 This time it was about missing the meat and bread they had eaten in Egypt. *"Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you [our leaders] have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."* Ex.16:3

ISRAEL REQUESTS EARTHLY FOOD

GOD SAYS 'YES' TO THE REQUEST  
AND PROVIDES QUAIL

BUT GOD HAS SOMETHING FAR  
BETTER IN MIND...

# MANNA *from* HEAVEN

AND THEY ATE OF THE MANNA



SUPERNATURAL MANNA  
GOD'S BREAD FROM HEAVEN

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, *"I have heard the complaints of the children of Israel. Speak to them, saying, At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. And you shall know that I am the LORD your God."* So it was that quail came up at evening and covered the camp, and in the morning the dew lay all around the camp. 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. 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..."* Ex.16:11-15

Significantly, a memorial portion of this manna was to be collected and kept for future generations so that Israel would be able to see the bread which God had given their forefathers in the wilderness after He had brought them out of Egypt.

*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.* Ex.16:35

The people had witnessed God's marvellous provisions, yet their rebellion against Him didn't cease. A short time later, at Mt. Sinai, they moulded and worshipped a golden calf. And then, shortly before their first arrival at the border of the Promised Land, they once again complained of not having meat. This time it was the mixed multitude that started the trouble (the many non-Israelites that had accompanied them from Egypt - see Ex.12:38). But Israelites soon joined their lament for what they had left behind in Egypt:

*"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? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!"* Nu.11:4-6

## ISRAEL STILL DOES NOT TRUST GOD

So Moses asked the LORD, *"Where am I to get meat to give to all these people? For they weep all over me, saying, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.'"* Nu.11:13

And the LORD answered, *"Then you shall say to the people, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the hearing of the LORD, saying, 'Who will give us meat to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt.'" Therefore the LORD will give you meat, and you shall eat. You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but for a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have despised the LORD who is among you, and have wept before Him, saying, "Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?"*" Num. 11:18-20

And Moses said, *"The people whom I am among are six hundred thousand men on foot; yet You have said, 'I will give them meat, that they may eat for a whole month. 'Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, to provide enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to provide enough for them?'"* Nu.11:21-22

Meat for a whole month for so many people meant a huge amount of animals. Moses' questions could be interpreted in three ways: "Lord, we won't have enough!" "Lord, it will wipe out our livestock!" Or a simple, "Lord, tell me what to do!" Either way, Moses expected to provide the meat himself. But God had other ideas.

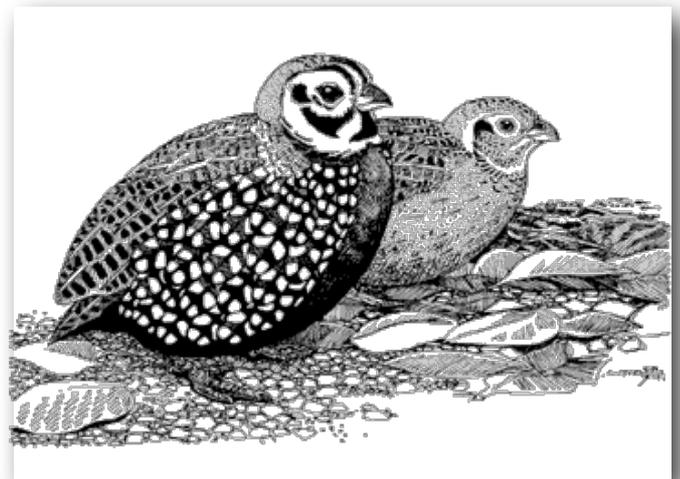
And so the LORD said to Moses, *"Has the LORD'S arm been shortened? Now you shall see whether what I say will happen to you or not."*Nu.11:23

## THEIR REQUEST BECOMES A PEST

*Now a wind went out from the LORD, and it brought quail from the sea and left them fluttering near the camp, about a day's journey on this side and about a day's journey on the other side, all around the camp, and about two cubits above the surface of the ground. And the people stayed up all that day, all night, and all the next day, and gathered the quail...and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp. But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was aroused against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very great plague...[and] there they buried the people who had yielded to craving.* Nu.11:31-34

It seems that only some of the people yielded to their craving because the rest moved on after the appointed time. Had they known that they were only days away from the Promised Land, would they have trusted God instead of complaining?

God had proven His power over and over. And yet, when ten of the twelve spies returned from their expedition with bad reports, the people chose to believe the ten evil men rather than the two godly ones. Their lack of faith cost them dearly: they would spend forty more years in the wilderness with nothing but manna and water.



## God's Final Warnings

Before the next generation was finally allowed to enter the Promised Land, God gave them another reminder of who He was and what He had done for them:

*"And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not [previously] know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD. Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the LORD your God chastens you."* Deut.8:2-5

God also warned them NOT to become proud once they acquired riches in the new land, and not to attribute their riches to their own power, saying of themselves, *“My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.”* Deut.8:18 He admonished:

*“Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments...who brought water for you out of the flinty rock; who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end.”* Deut.8:11,15-16

## ANSWERS FROM THE BIBLE

Ex.10:25-26,38 confirms that a great deal of livestock accompanied Israel into the wilderness and that at least some of the animals were intended for sacrificial purposes. My initial response to June’s questions had been correct, but at the same time it was far from complete.

The Bible indicates that the Israelites had livestock all the way to the end. But how did the animals stay alive? People were fed with manna, but the animals? The Bible doesn’t say. We can only assume that God kept them alive, just as he prevented personal garments from wearing out and feet swelling with fluid during the whole 40-year journey (see Ex.8:5).

Next question: if the people had animals, why would they have asked for meat? The first time they asked for it, they had only been traveling for 45 days - with plenty of animals in tow. This is indeed curious. The only explanation we have is that God (through Moses) must have forbidden them to eat their livestock. Why?

Scripture tells us that it was God who humbled and tested his people with hunger to see if they would obey Him. Deut.8:2-3 And it was God who supplied the meat in form of quail (His choice). He used natural meat, supernaturally flown in from the seashore, so Israel would know the power of their God.

This first supply of quail was a one-off, delicious evening meal. But then God gave them something far superior: bread from heaven, which would sustain them for more than 40 years in the wilderness.

But Israel’s gratitude didn’t last long. They soon forgot God’s miraculous provision of freedom and sustenance, and once again pined for Egypt and the foods they had enjoyed during their captivity. This happened just before their first arrival at the border of Canaan, and God promised meat for a whole month.

Consequently, Moses asked God whether they should slaughter their flocks and herds, or gather fish from the sea to provide enough meat for a whole month. The context does not clarify whether this was a somewhat facetious question, indicating that they didn’t

have enough meat or fish for the multitude, or whether Moses simply asked for directions.

In any case, God once again did things His own way. He sent quail. Lots of them. And the people who had despised the heavenly manna by yielding to temptation would now eat their meat with dreadful consequences: first, they would loathe it, and then they would die from a plague God had sent to punish them. This plague was a direct result of not heeding His voice (see Ex.15:25-26). God ALWAYS has the last say.

Why God chose to supply quail instead of other meat we do not know. The Bible is silent on this choice. For those who would like to ponder the characteristics of quail, I have included a short description on page 5 (underneath the picture).

In conclusion, the moral of this ‘story’ is that God tested Israel in the wilderness and many of them failed. They had short memories; they yearned for the food they had enjoyed in slavery; they asked for natural food (meat) instead of appreciating the supernatural food they had received from heaven (manna). Nonetheless there were others who did not give in to those fleshly cravings and lived.

It seems that God expressly forbade the eating of livestock during Israel’s exodus so that He could prove Himself to be their sole provider and sustainer. As Moses later explains: *“He [God] humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.”* Deut.8:3

- GOD TESTS – ISRAEL FAILS
- GOD PROVIDES – ISRAEL REJECTS
- GOD PUNISHES SIN – PEOPLE DIE
- GOD BLESSES FAITH – PEOPLE LIVE

Can we learn anything from this study?

## Applications for Today



For whom  
the Lord  
loves  
He chastens  
Hebrews 12:6

## APPLICATIONS FOR TODAY

Paul's admonition in 1 Corinthians ch.10:

*"...all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition..."* 1 Cor.10:11

- God is our provider and sustainer also
- Therefore be content with what He gives
- Count your blessings (including your trials!)
- Don't grumble or envy others
- Don't give in to temptation
- Don't crave the things of this world (Egypt)
- Crave the things of God's kingdom
- Crave for righteousness
- Obey the word of God
- Look to Jesus, the author and finisher of faith
- Taste and see that the Lord is good
- Blessed is the person who trusts in HIM



Quail need little water and live in fields of tall grass or grain, spending most of their life on the ground. Over short distances (6 m in 1 sec) they are pretty fast runners, fast enough to escape most predators. They can also fly, but only for short distances. Some are very fast, having been timed flying at speeds of up to 80 km/hr.

## Jesus said:

It is written...

■ *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.* Deut.8:3 & Matt.4:4

■ *You shall not tempt the LORD your God.* Deut.6:16 & Matt.4:7

■ *You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only shall you serve.* Deut.6:13 & Matt.4:10



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Dr. Margaret Lepke and her husband Henry live in Sydney, Australia. They serve God through various ministries including Biblical Publications, a website providing free e-resources. Margaret combines her background of adult education, social science, theology and research with her love of writing. She also has a PhD in Biblical Studies.

## TIMELINE OF THE ENTIRE EXODUS JOURNEY

This chart has been adapted from a comparative time line of 360-day-bible-prophecy and lunar-cycle years found on <http://www.1260-1290-days-bible-prophecy.org/Jubilee-exodus-chart-bible-prophecy.htm> - an interesting site - check it out. Some horizontal columns have been deleted because they are not relevant to our purpose. Provisions of manna and quail have been highlighted in yellow to show when and where they took place in relation to the Exodus timeline.

Column #1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6
The (first) New Year (1446 BC)	Select Lamb/ Passover	Exodus from Egypt	Wilderness of Sin	Mount Sinai	Sprinkling of blood of Sinai covenant
<i>Bible-Prophecy-360-cal.</i> *** Day 1 (incl.) (Day '0' excl.)	Day 10 and 14	Day 15	Day 45	Day 61 (incl.) (Day 60 excl.)	Day 64
Exodus 12:2; 12:40-41	Exodus 12:2-6	Exodus 12:51	Exodus 16:1	Exodus 19:1	Exodus 19:11; 24:4; 24:1-11
First day of the new datum for counting the years. I.e., The first day of the first year.		Day 15-21 = 7 days of unleavened bread. (Exodus 13:6.) Day 16 = first-fruits, plus 49 days (7 x 7) until Pentecost (Lev. 23:9-14).	<b>Intermediate stop en route to Mt Sinai. Manna begins.</b>	Day 61 is assumed to have just begun, (i.e., just after evening).	Occurs 3½ days after arrival at Mount Sinai.
Column #7		#8	#9	#10	#11
Moses ascends mount 40 days to receive law on tablets of stone, etc. (1446 BC)		Moses comes down mount Golden calf	Moses ascends mount second time for 40 days	Moses descends again	Building of tabernacle furnishings begins
<i>Bible-Prophecy-cal.</i> *** Day 65 (incl.) Day 64 (excl.) (p.m.?)		Day 104 (p.m.?)	Day 106 (a.m.)	Day 146 (a.m.)	Day 147
Exodus 24:12-18		Exodus 32	Exodus 32:30; 34:2,28	Exodus 34:27-35	Exodus 35
Day 64 ending to <b>day 71</b> (day 70 of lunar) are the 7 days "the glory of God" covered the Mount. Moses ascends into the cloud on the 7th day and stays 33 more days, a total of 40 days on the Mount. Also, Day 65 is the day of <b>Pentecost</b> , counted 49 days after <i>first fruits</i> , Exodus 34:22. Scholars see similarity of this Pentecost with the Pentecost of Acts 1, i.e., "tongues of fire," and "a sound like mighty wind."		Jewish tradition places golden calf on 01/04/17 of lunar cal. [16th, if by Bible-Prophecy cal.]			

Column #12	#13	#14	#15	#16
Tabernacle assembled, then cloud covers tabernacle (1445 BC)	Census taken	Leave Sinai: Cloud lifts from tabernacle	Camp rests after 3-days journey	Send out 12 spies
<i>Bible-Prophecy-cal.</i> *** Day 361	Day 391	Day 410	Day 413	Day 449- <b>450</b> (p.m.)
Exodus 40:1,17,34, Numbers 9:15-23	Numbers 1:1-3	Numbers 9:15-23; 10:11	Numbers 10:33-36	Numbers 13:1-24
Plus 7 (and 8) days ordination of sons of Aaron., Lev. 8:33; 9:1. Instructions about Jubilees, etc., given sometime over next 49 days. Passover celebrated second time, Numbers 9.	All males 20 years and under counted.	Next 40 days based upon the total of the data supplied us, taken literally as is, and confirmed by Jewish tradition and the prophet Ezekiel; i.e., 3 + 30 + 7 days = 40 days, (40½?) from day 410 till day 450. (See next two columns.)	<b>Israelites complain about manna---get quail for 30 days (Num. 11)</b> Miriam sins, camp does not move for 7 more days, Num 12. <i>Pentecost</i> would have been day 425.	Day 449 is according to Jewish tradition, but day 450 is more accurate. (See previous row.) The same conflict occurs for the date of the fall of Jerusalem's temple---tradition has Av. 9, the prophet Jeremiah says Av. 10, (Jeremiah 52:12). Importantly, both these dates are the <b>anniversaries of when the spies came back with the evil report</b> ---in agreement with the prophet Ezekiel, who ties <b>all</b> these events together, (ch. 4; 24:15-27).