

**THE BREAD OF THE PRESENCE  
CHRIST - THE BREAD OF LIFE  
EXODUS 25:23-30**

**INTRODUCTION:**

The table set on the north side of the Holy Place. It was not a very large table, but it was a very impressive table. It was made out of acacia wood and was overlaid with pure gold. Its measurements were 3 feet long by 1 1/2 feet wide by 27 inches high. It had around the top of it a little crown made of gold. There were in connection with the table several utensils that were also made of gold. This included some in which wine was placed and some in which incense was placed. On each Sabbath, the attending priest would bring twelve loaves of fresh bread to be placed on the table and the twelve loaves that had been on the table for a week would be eaten by the priests. The significance of this particular piece of furniture and the bread that placed on it week by week has proven to be a source of great encouragement to God's people across the years.

There were two aspects of the ministry of the table of the bread of the presence. The first aspect related primarily to the nation of Israel in the old economy. The second aspect was a typical or prophetic one that related to the coming of the Lord Jesus into the world. There is much for us to learn from both of these aspects of this table and the bread.

**I. THE TABLE OF SHOWBREAD ACKNOWLEDGES THE GOD WHO  
PROVIDES OUR BREAD.**

The actual name for the table itself is interesting and helpful. Traditionally, it has been translated in our Bibles "the table of showbread." Actually, the Hebrew word translated "show" is better translated "presence." In fact, in the instructions given to Moses in the New International Version we read, "Put the bread of the presence on this table to be before me at all times." In the instructions relating to the table and the bread that are found in the book of Leviticus you will find similar language. There Moses received the instruction "It belongs to Aaron and his sons who are to eat it in a holy place, because it is a most holy part of their regular share of the offerings made to the Lord by fire" (Leviticus 24:9). So, it was obviously understood by the Hebrews as being an offering, a bread offering made to God. Even more literally than the word "presence" would be the word "faces." There seems to have been in the mind of Hebrew worshipper the idea that through the bread they were presenting themselves before the face of God, so there was an interaction of their face and the face of God in this offering of twelve loaves.

Concerning this offering to the Lord there is at least this understanding - it is an acknowledgement that God is the source of our bread.

1. He is the source of all our bread.

It is significant that there were twelve of these loaves, one representing each of the twelve tribes of Israel. The loaves were of significant size and were placed on the table on each Sabbath day. Exactly how they were arranged on the tables is not clear. The size of the table and the size of the loaves seemed to indicate that they could not have been placed in two rows of six loaves each. It is probably better to understand that they were actually

two stacks of loaves on the table. It was an offering in which the Hebrew people were acknowledging gratefully to God that they were fully aware that they had bread to eat because He had been faithful to provide. Each of the tribes was dependent upon the faithfulness of God to bless their efforts to make sure that when the time for eating came there was bread on their tables.

When they built the tabernacle in the wilderness, they were still in the process of receiving manna day by day. The manna was their bread, their bread from heaven! When they constructed the tabernacle that began this ritual, it was a definite way, and intentional way, to acknowledge God as the source of their bread day by day.

In our Christian prayers, we pray as Jesus taught us to pray. "Give us this day our daily bread." We, too, live with an awareness that even the bread that we eat day by day ultimately comes from the hand of a provident and generous heavenly Father. Jesus transferred from the Old Testament tabernacle to the daily prayers of His disciples this awareness of God as the source. Do you still acknowledge God as the source? In this mechanized, commercialized generation, we may be more likely to thank General Foods than we are a gracious heavenly Father or we may be more inclined to thank the Agricultural Department of the United States government. But the reality is we have food to eat because our heavenly Father has been faithful to provide food for our table.

2. He is the partner in all of our works.

There is an interesting side to those loaves of bread. While it is true that God was the source of the bread, He had not provided the bread however without their participation. The farmers had prepared their field, planted their seed, and harvested their crop, ground the grain into flour, and baked the bread. It is true that without God sending the rain at the appropriate time and God causing the processes of nature to work so fruitfully, there would have been no bread. However, it is also true, that if the farmer had not prepared the field, planted the crop, gathered the crop, prepared the bread, there would have been no bread. So, the offering acknowledges God as the ultimate source, but it also acknowledges a very firm and lasting partnership between God and His people in this process.

We need in our offerings of the sacrifices of Thanksgiving and in our acknowledgement of God's goodness to acknowledge this lasting partnership between God and his people. Is it not a wonderful thing to live with an awareness day by day that while I go about my daily assignments, doing my daily task, carrying out my duty, I am in partnership with a provident and faithful heavenly Father. He will cause my efforts, my labor, to be turned into bread upon my table. Thanks be to our heavenly Father who is both our provider and our partner in life itself.

## **II. THE TABLE OF SHOWBREAD REVEALS THE SON WHO IS OUR BREAD.**

It has been my commitment as we have looked at these pieces from the tabernacle to look for Christ in the tabernacle. My own interest in this section of scripture was excited and enriched when I began to see prophetic things concerning the coming of Jesus. These

have been the realities that have warmed my heart and stirred my devotion toward Him across the years. This table of showbread is a picture of that very important ministry of Jesus as the Bread of life. Just as He claimed to be "the light of the world" He also laid bold claim to being the "Bread of God from heaven." So when we read about these twelve loaves of bread being placed week by week before the Lord in this holy place, we should be reminded that Jesus is our Bread of life. What bread is to man in the natural, Jesus is to man in the spiritual.

#### 1. The qualities of the bread.

When you turn to Leviticus, you find a more detailed instruction about the quality of the bread that was placed on the table before the Lord Sabbath by Sabbath. The Lord said to Moses in that context, "Take fine flour and bake twelve loaves of bread, using 2/10 of an ephah for each loaf" (An ephah is approximately 4 quarts or 4.5 liters.) Set them in two rows, six in each row, on the table of pure gold before the Lord. Along each row put some pure incense as a memorial to represent the bread and to be an offering made to the Lord by fire. This bread is to be set out before the Lord regularly, Sabbath after Sabbath on behalf of the Israelites as a lasting covenant. It belongs to Aaron and his sons, who are to eat it in a holy place because it is the most holy part of their regular share of the offerings made to the Lord by fire." From this passage there are several qualities that become rather obvious.

##### (a) The freshness of the bread.

The bread is typical of the Lord Jesus in His freshness. The bread was left on the table only seven days. At the end of the seven days, it was removed from the table and eaten by

the priest. It was never left there long enough to become overly stale or moldy. It was never necessary to throw the bread away. It could not be thrown away because it was holy bread and it was always fresh.

Once you come to know the Lord Jesus as the Bread of life, you will find in Him a perennial freshness. Your relationship with Him never becomes boring or dull or dry, There is always a fresh reality in Him and in your relationship with Him. It is true that church and religious practices may become dry and boring, but not a vital relationship with the Lord Jesus!

(b) The sufficiency of the bread.

There were twelve loaves on the table. Each loaf was made of approximately four quart of fine flour. It is estimated that this is approximately twice the daily allowance or need for a Hebrew male, so each loaf would be sufficient for two days. The size of the loaves and the number of the loaves calls attention to the sufficiency of the bread. In Christ, there is more than enough to meet the need of the worshiper priest.

(c) The purity of the bread.

The instructions included that no leaven could be included in the bread. In the Old Testament system, leaven is the symbol of the pervasive presence of sin. Any thing that represents the Lord Jesus could not have leaven because there is no sin in Him. This bread was untainted by leaven, unmarked by sin. The Lord Jesus is in every way completely adequate and totally pure in the presentation of Himself to us as the bread of

life. There was nothing in Him to offend the Father, or to make Him less than what we needed.

There are other things we could have considered such as the baking of the bread being a type of the sufferings of our Lord. We could have also included the fact that it was "fine flour," which would speak of the fine character of the Lord Jesus Christ. But we will not go into all of those details. The ones that we suggested are adequate to remind us of just what a beautiful picture this is of the character and quality of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

## 2. The purpose of the bread.

When we look at the purpose of the bread we will begin to see more fully our Lord Jesus as the Bread of life. There are three aspects of the purpose for us to consider.

### (a) The satisfaction of our hunger

This was the thing that Jesus focused upon with His disciples when He presented Himself to them as "the Bread of life." You will remember that He developed this truth based upon the multiplying of the loaves and fishes to feed the 5,000 in John 6. In His teaching concerning the loaves and the fishes, He reminded them that the bread He had provided the day before would still leave them hungering again. None of the food of earth can ever meet the deepest need of the human heart. The deepest hunger of life goes deeper than the physical, even to the very core of one's being, the spiritual side of life. It was in that context that Jesus said, "But it is my Father who gives you the true bread from

heaven, for the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" (John 6:32-33). He then declared to the multitude, "I am the bread of life, he who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35).

We have in this statement from John's gospel the same "I am" formula that we had with reference to the light of the world. It literally means, "I and none other am the Bread of life." The claim that Jesus makes is that when men receive Him as the Bread of life that they will never go hungry and will never thirst again. What does it mean to receive Him as the Bread of life? In the parallel statement in John's gospel, he indicates that it means to believe in him. "And he who believes in me will never be thirsty." Helpfully, the verbs in both of these statements, "He who comes to me," and, "He who believes in me" are present tense verbs. This means that there is a continual coming and a continual believing in Him. These point to an abiding relationship with Him. Whenever you make Jesus the bread of life in your life it means that you look to Him and to Him only for the satisfaction of the deepest hunger of life – and He never, never, disappoints.

(b) The sustaining of our strength .

Bread goes a step beyond the satisfaction of the hunger of life. It also is the source of sustenance and strength for the living of life. When Jesus presents Himself as the Bread of life, this is the claim that He is making. He is making the claim that through Him and in Him we can find all the strength we need for the sustaining of life in this kind of world. Just as one must have bread to sustain their physical strength, so you must have Christ

and Christ alone to sustain the spiritual strength of your life. In His further detailed expansion of the idea, Jesus begins to talk about His flesh and His blood. He declares, "Who ever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living father sent me I lived because of the father, so he who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Our forefathers ate manna and died but he who feeds on this bread will live forever" (John 6:56-58). The reality is that when you make Jesus the bread of life, you find in Him life with a capital "L." You find in him life that is abundant, full, free, abounding. He is the source of the sustenance that is needed for the sustaining of life day by day.

(c) The enjoyment of our communion.

This is the other aspect of the bread. It is a reminder to us of just how important bread is in the course of life. The breaking of bread is often the occasion of communion. As those consecrated priests ate of that holy bread from the table in the tabernacle, in a deep and meaningful way they were communing with the God of heaven. They were breaking bread with God Himself. When Jesus presented Himself as the bread of life, he is making claim to this reality - you and I can know fellowship with God through Him. Some expositors have called the table in the tabernacle the table of fellowship. It is a reminder to us of how deeply God desires communion with Him through the broken body, the broken bread of His son.

Indeed our communion table, the Lord's Supper, is carrying that same idea into another dimension. Every time we come to the table, we are reminded that we commune with

God through Jesus the bread of life. The Father finds satisfaction in the broken bread of His son, and we find satisfaction in the broken bread of His son. At the point of our mutual satisfaction in Him we come together in Holy Communion.

And is not all of this a reminder that there will be a table in heaven? Indeed there will be. One of the metaphors used in Scripture about the reality of the eternal kingdom of God is that of communion at a banquet. Jesus Himself indicated that we would sit down together at the table in the kingdom and that He will serve us. In the Revelation, it talks about the banquet for the marriage of the Lamb. Oh, what a day that will be!

So every time we enjoy communion with God through the Lord Jesus it is only a foretaste when we will sit down at the table of fellowship in the eternal kingdom. Indeed, Jesus is the Bread of life. That little golden table in the Holy Place was preparing us to understand that Jesus is the one who will satisfy our hunger, sustain us in our struggles, and open to us the enjoyment of communion with God. Thanks be to God for the Bread from heaven!