

引言 INTRODUCTION

The two words in the sermon title are very similar in their meanings. Very often they are used interchangeably. To be thankful is to acknowledge a benefit you receive. For example, you say thanks to a waiter who brings food to your table. In comparison, to be grateful is a deeper sense of appreciation. For example, you are grateful to God that you have a job when you hear a company announces a massive lay-off. We shall see in our story today whether the Israelites were thankful and grateful to God. At that time they just left Egypt for a month. God saved them after they were slaves for 400 years. The Bible says there were six hundred thousand men. If we assume that each man had a family of four members, then there were more than two million people. God was leading them to Canaan. He was about to fulfill His promise to Abraham and gave his descendants the land. There were some big challenges ahead. How could they get enough water and food for so many people? It is a wilderness between Egypt and Canaan. A simple answer is: they must rely on God. We as Christians have to do the same thing as we go through life's journey. God saved us from the bondage of sin, and He will lead us to heaven. Meanwhile, we walk by faith on a daily basis. We can be thankful and grateful when we acknowledge God as our Provider.

解釋 EXPLANATION

1. 定時的問題 Timed Problem

Let us study this passage based on three phrases. The first one is “timed problem.” The Israelites showed a timed problem of complaining whenever they faced a new obstacle. Let us hear the reading of **verse 2 and 3**, and also **6 to 8**. Those people were like unhappy customers. The Bible says (in Numbers 14:22) they tested God ten times with their whining in the whole journey. The first time happened when the Egyptian army was chasing after their tails. They complained to Moses for bringing them out of Egypt and allowing them to be killed by enemies. God rescued them by dividing the water of the Red Sea. Later they grumbled in the wilderness because the spring water was bitter. God asked Moses to perform a miracle to make the water drinkable. This time the subject was on the lack of food. They described the situation in verse 3: **...“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.”** There is no Biblical record to prove that they had all-you-can-eat buffet when in Egypt. Regardless, did they forget that they were slaves the past 400 years? They were forced to perform hard labor. Did they really want to go back there? To whom did they launch the complaints? “Grumbling” and similar words are repeated 8 times in this chapter. Moses and Aaron were the targets of grumbling twice, and God was the subject on the other six occasions. Even when pointing fingers to Moses and Aaron, those people blamed God, saying: “Lord, why do you leave us here and allow us to starve to death?” Leaders at home, at work and in the church take the heat all the time. Wise leaders should distinguish between “I’m not happy with this” versus “I’m not happy with you!” when people complain. Otherwise, they will feel responsible for all the problems and they will be overwhelmed by discouraging comments. Also,

it is typical human nature to focus on the negative aspect rather than the positive side. Like the Israelites did, people like to exaggerate the issues too. Such destructive emotion will spread like wildfire in a team. Moses and Aaron had to deal with two million whiners! What can we learn in the story so far? Let me suggest a few spiritual lessons. **Number 1:** Since God has saved us, we must not return to our “Egypt.” The Israelites dreamed about the comfort and convenience of Egypt. They forgot the oppression and suffering in the past. They were so used to following the orders from slave-masters. In a spiritual sense, our “Egypt” is the state while we did not know Jesus. We are so used to sinning because it gives us instant benefits. For example, we can dodge the responsibility of our mistakes when we lie. We can save some money by cheating. Do not forget that we have a new life in Jesus. We do not need to listen to our old master, Satan, anymore. Instead, we should please our Lord Jesus. **Number 2:** Obstacles can be opportunities for growth. Why were they in the wilderness? They were not on a sight-seeing trip. They were on their way to the Promised Land. They would be stuck in the desert unless they obeyed God and stepped out in faith. God has a goal when you hit a roadblock. He wants you to increase your faith. We should grow much like promoting to a higher grade in school. No one should remain in the elementary school, although the lessons are easier! Algebra prepares students for Calculus. God may be giving you a bigger role in your career. You will not move up if you are complacent with the basic skills you acquired five years ago. Once in a while, God may shake you up with a lay-off, relocation or a medical issue to keep you humble. Then you realize that there are situations you cannot predict or control. God asks us to put our trust in Him no matter what circumstances we may face. When He says it is time to move on, then we just follow Him.

2. 及時的供應 Timely Provision

God was patient to a bunch of grumbling people. He also showed them mercy by arranging a timely provision. The passage says God sent the Israelites birds when they asked for meat. This could be a one-time supply of meat until another incident later in the book of Numbers. Our focus today is on God’s promise of daily food. We will read **verse 4 to 5**. A few things of note here. First, this food fell down from the sky. Second, there would be a constant provision every morning. Third, every person should gather enough food just for that day. The limit was one omer. It is about half-a-gallon or 2 liters. Fourth, God allowed them to collect a double portion on the sixth day of the week. The next day would be the Sabbath and no food would be given because God designated it as a time of rest. What kind of food was that? We find the answer in verse 31: **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.** Manna was like plant seeds. It appeared as a thin layer of frost on the ground every morning. People asked each other what it was. Therefore, they simply called it manna, which means “what is it” in Hebrew. It is sweet in flavor. People picked them and ground them to powder and made bread out of it. Here we can derive **the third spiritual lesson:** Work is an active way to receive God’s blessings. Manna was a gift from God. But people still had to work before they could eat. They could not just tilt their heads and expect manna to drop into their mouths. The world tells us that work is torture. It says the smartest people are those who can earn money as quickly as possible and retire as soon as possible so that they no longer have to work. That is not what the Bible says. God gives you abilities to develop new products, find creative ways to solve problems or serve people. Any achievement will bring you satisfaction. To work is to stay productive. God gave the Israelites detailed instructions about manna. He said clearly that the food was a test of their obedience. How did they score? They

failed badly. Violation number 1. Look at **verses 19 and 20**. Some people were greedy. They took more than they could eat, only to find out that the leftover went bad the next day. God provided food abundantly so that people did not need to fight for their share. But there was manna everywhere. Why not pick more? You see people with the same mentality at Costco every weekend. They go there for lunch. Why not grab more since those food samples are free? People feel good that they get some exercise by walking around while pushing a shopping cart. Violation number 2 is in **verses 26 and 27**. Some people were worried that manna would stop coming. Therefore, they went out to look for it on the Sabbath. But did God not promise a new batch six days a week? He preserved enough food for them even though no manna was given on the Sabbath. An amazing thing happened in verse 24: **So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it.** The manna rotted when people disobeyed God and stocked it up. In contrast, the food stayed fresh the next day when they followed God's command. God set a new routine for them to work six days and rest one day. The idea behind the Sabbath was not only to rest from labor, but also to rest and find time to worship God. God gave them instructions later in the book about worship. That brings us to spiritual lesson **Number 4**: There is a time to work and there is a time to worship. Most of us work five days a week. We are more blessed than the Israelites! Our bodies and our minds need a break every now and then. But how do you spend your weekend? There is nothing wrong about enjoying your hobbies and spending time with your family. Besides, we need to make worship a top priority for Sunday. We gather with brothers and sisters to praise God. Moreover, it helps us refocus on God as we begin a new week. It reminds us that He is the Lord of our lives. We cherish our relationship with Him. He is the source of all blessings.

3. 隨時的證明 Timeless Proof

Because of God's faithfulness, a food crisis was resolved. However, God did not want His people to forget this incident. Therefore, He asked them to use a token as a timeless proof of His grace. We will finish the reading from **verse 33 to 35**. God told His people to keep an omer of manna for future generations to see. The jar would be stored "before the testimony," referring to the Ark of the Covenant. The instructions on how to build the Ark are recorded in chapter 25. This chest symbolizes God's presence. It was so sacred that only the high priests had the privilege to approach it once a year. Perhaps they might display the manna to the people at certain festivals. By keeping it for years, it implied that the manna would not go bad. God preserved it just like He preserved the manna before every Sabbath. It served as a "show-and-tell" prop for the descendants. On the one hand, it witnessed God's faithfulness to their ancestors. God fed them when they were in the wilderness. There were other occasions when God asked the Israelites to save a keepsake to remember His works. For example, God told the Israelites to set 12 stones on the river bank after they crossed the Jordan river and marched into Canaan. Joshua told them the reason in Joshua 4:6-7 – **6 ... "When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' 7 then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord..."** Children would ask their parents or grandparents the meaning behind those stones. They would tell the kids what God did in the past. For the same reason, people build monuments and statues to recall historical events and key figures. Other than remembering God's faithfulness, the manna would also recount people's failure. Verse 35 previews a painful consequence: **The people of Israel ate the manna forty years, till they came to a habitable land. They ate the manna till they came to the border of the land of Canaan.** It takes

shorter than 2 weeks to travel from Egypt to Canaan. Why did the Israelites spend 40 years to get there? It was because they were afraid of the enemies, so much so that they suggested to fire Moses and elect another leader to lead them back to Egypt. The story is recorded in Numbers chapter 14. As a result, God disciplined them and they walked in circles for the next forty years until that generation passed away. How tragic! But for now, the manna helped the Israelites keep in mind God's provision. That relates to **Number 5** on the list of spiritual lessons: Keepsakes bring back memories of God's grace. For example, a cross reminds us of Jesus' death. Some people wear it on their necks. Churches display it outside their buildings or hang it on the walls. Christians also observe the communion on a regularly basis to remember Jesus' sacrifice. You can keep items to remember God's work at special moments of your life too. Many people store photos they took with loved ones, at their childhood homes or at memorable events. Nowadays, you can conveniently save them in your phone. Not too long ago, people used scrapbooks to preserve things like ultrasound images of their coming babies, tickets of the first movie the family watched or a copy of their first paycheck. I still have the letters from the hospital telling me that the medical bills for the birth of the boys were waived. At that time I had no income. The hospital literally gave me two free babies! Objects like those are snapshots of your life. They are also timeless proofs of God's love. Your faith will be strengthened as you recall those critical episodes. God was faithful to you in the past. He will continue to be faithful to you in the future.

結論 CONCLUSION

We can be thankful and grateful when we acknowledge God as our Provider. It does not depend on what we have and how much we have. All it takes is the right mindset that everything comes from God. In closing, let me share with you the following poem. The title is simply "I Am Thankful." The author writes that she is thankful... For the husband who complains when his dinner is not on time, because he is home with me, not with someone else. For the teenager who is complaining about doing dishes, because that means she is at home and not on the streets. For the taxes that I pay, because it means that I am employed. For the lawn that needs mowing, because it means I have a home. For all the complaining I hear about the government, because it means that we have freedom of speech. For the lady behind me in church that sings off-key, because it means that I can hear. For the alarm that goes off in the early morning hours, because it means that I am alive. We can be thankful and grateful when we pay attention to what we have instead of what we do not have. When you walk out of this place, be grateful to God for this old building that you call your spiritual home. When you sit in your car, be grateful to Him for giving you a means of transportation. When you arrive home, be grateful to Him for a home and a family. When you wake up tomorrow morning, be grateful to Him because He will give you new grace.

引言 INTRODUCTION

講道題目中的兩個用詞意思相近。它們常常可以交換使用。「感謝」是對所得到的好處作回應。例如，當侍應生把食物端到你桌上時，你會對他說謝謝。比較之下，「感激」是一種更深層的情緒表達。例如，當你聽到一家公司宣布大規模裁員時，你為自己仍有工作而感激神的看顧。在今天的故事中，我們來看看以色列人是否對神懷有感謝與感激之心。那時他們剛離開埃及約一個月。神拯救了他們，使他們脫離四百年的奴役。聖經說當時有六十萬男士。若假設每位男士都是一家四口的話，那麼總人數超過兩百萬。神正在帶領他們前往迦南。祂即將實現祂對亞伯拉罕的應許，將那地賜給他的後裔。然而，前面有許多重大的挑戰。他們如何為這麼多人找到足夠的水和食物呢？埃及與迦南之間是一片曠野。最簡單的答案是：他們必須依靠神。作為基督徒，我們在生命旅程中也必須依靠神。神救我們脫離罪的捆綁，並將引領我們進入天國。與此同時，我們每天都要憑信心而活。當我們承認神是我們的供應者之時，我們就能懷著感謝與感激的心生活。

解釋 EXPLANATION

1. 定時的問題 Timed Problem

讓我們以三個用詞來思考這段經文。第一個是定時的問題。以色列人有一個定時的問題。每當他們遇到新的困難，就開始發怨言。讓我們一起來讀第 2 至 3 節，以及第 6 至 8 節。那些人就像不滿意的顧客。聖經（民數記 14:22）說他們在整個旅程中用埋怨試探神達十次之多。第一次發生在埃及軍隊追趕他們的時候。他們埋怨說摩西把他們從埃及帶出來，是要讓他們死在敵人手中。神藉著分開紅海拯救了他們。後來，他們又在曠野發怨言，因為泉水是鹹的。神吩咐摩西行神蹟，使水變得可以飲用。而這一次，他們埋怨的原因是缺乏糧食。他們在第 3 節形容說：...「巴不得我們早死在埃及地、耶和華的手下；那時我們坐在肉鍋旁邊，吃得飽足。你們將我們領出來，到這曠野，是要叫這全會眾都餓死啊！」聖經並沒有記載他們在埃及可以享受自助餐生活。無論如何，難道他們忘記了自己在過去四百年是奴隸？他們被迫做苦工。他們真的想回到那裡嗎？他們到底向誰埋怨呢？「發怨言」或類似的用詞在這一章中出現了八次。摩西和亞倫是兩次發怨言的對象，而其餘六次的對象是神。就算他們表面上是責怪摩西和亞倫，其實他們是在埋怨神，說：「神啊，為什麼你把我們留在這裡，讓我們餓死呢？」在家庭、工作場所和教會中的領袖常常承受這樣的壓力。有智慧的領袖應該分辨人們在埋怨時，是說「我對這件事不滿意」，還是「我對你不滿意」！否則，他們會以為自己要為所有問題負責，最終被

這些負面的言語打倒。同時，人類的本性往往是專注於負面的，而忽略正面的。而且就像以色列人那樣，人們也喜歡把問題誇大。這種破壞性的情緒會在一個團體中會像野火一樣蔓延。摩西和亞倫要面對兩百萬個愛抱怨的人！到目前為止，我們可以從這個故事中學到什麼屬靈的功課呢？我提出兩點：**第一**：既然神已經拯救了我們，就不要回到我們的「埃及」。以色列人懷念埃及的舒服與方便，卻忘了過去的壓迫與痛苦。他們太習慣聽從工頭的命令。在屬靈的意義上，我們的「埃及」就是我們還不認識耶穌的時候。我們習慣犯罪，因為罪往往帶來短暫的好處。例如，我們說謊可以逃避責任；欺騙可以省錢。但不要忘記，我們在耶穌裡已得到新生命。我們不必再聽從舊主人—撒但的話，而是應該討主耶穌的喜悅。**第二**：困難是成長的機會。他們為什麼會在曠野？他們並不是去觀光旅遊，而是前往應許之地。除非他們順服神、憑信心前行，否則他們將一直被困在曠野。當你遇到難關時，神自有祂的心意。很可能祂要增長你的信心。屬靈的成長就像升上更高年級一樣，沒有人會永遠留在小學階段，雖然課程比較簡單！代數的學習是為了預備微積分。神也許讓你在工作場所擔任更重要的角色。如果你滿足於五年前的基本技能，就無法升職。有時候，神甚至會透過裁員、搬遷或健康問題來提醒我們，使我們保持謙卑。這時你會明白，有些情況是你無法預測或掌控的。神要我們在任何環境中都信靠祂。當祂說「是時候要往前行了」，我們就必須聽從祂。

2. 及時的供應 Timely Provision

神對這群愛發怨言的人依然保持耐心。並且神施憐憫，為他們準備了及時的供應。經文說，當以色列人想要吃肉時，神就賜給他們鵪鶉作食物。這可能是一次性的供應肉，直到後來在民數記中再次出現類似的事件。而我們今天的焦點，是關於神每天供應的食物。讓我們一起讀**第4至5節**。這裡有幾點值得注意：第一，這食物是從天上降下來的。第二，神每天早晨都有持續的供應。第三，每個人每天只能收取足夠當天所需的份量。限額是一俄梅珥，約等於半加侖或兩公升。第四，神允許他們在第六天收取雙倍的份量。因為第七天是安息日，是神定為休息的時候，所以不會賜食物。到底那是什麼食物呢？我們在第31節找到答案：**這食物，以色列家叫嗎哪；樣子像芫荽子，顏色是白的，滋味如同攪蜜的薄餅。**嗎哪像植物的種子。每天早晨像一層薄霜出現在地上。人們彼此問：「這是什麼？」因此他們就叫它「嗎哪」，在希伯來文的意思是「這是什麼？」它的味道是甜的。人們撿起來磨成粉，然後用來做餅吃。在這裡，我們可以得出**第三個**屬靈功課：工作是領受神祝福的一種積極方式。嗎哪是神的恩賜，但人仍然需要勞動才能得食。他們不能只是抬頭張口，期望嗎哪掉進嘴裡。今天有些人認為工作就是折磨，他們覺得最聰明的人是那些能最快賺錢、最早退休的人，這樣就不必再工作。但聖經不是這樣說的。神賜給你能力，使你能發明新產品、解決問題、服務他人。任何成就都能帶給你滿足感。工作能夠使人保持生產力。神給以色列人關於嗎哪的詳細指示。神明顯指出這是對他們順服的考驗。那麼，他們有沒有聽從神的吩咐？簡單來說，他們沒有。第一次

犯規是在第 19 至 20 節。有些人貪心，收取超過自己能吃的嗎哪。結果第二天食物發臭、長蟲。神充足地供應他們食物，使人人有份，不必爭奪。但他們仍然想多拿一些。這是人的常見心態。有些人喜歡在週末到 Costco 吃午餐。既然可以免費試吃，為什麼不多拿一點？他們推著購物車四處逛，覺得自己能夠順便運動，心裡感到很舒服。第二次犯規是記載在第 26 至 27 節。有些人擔心嗎哪會停止供應，因此他們在安息日仍然出去尋找食物。可是神不是已經應許一週六天都會供應嗎？祂也為他們保存糧食，讓他們在安息日不用出去撿食物。第 24 節記錄一個奇妙的情況：他們就照摩西的吩咐留到早晨，也不臭，裡頭也沒有蟲子。當他們違背神的命令囤積嗎哪時，食物就腐壞；但當他們遵守神的話，食物隔天卻依然新鮮。神為他們設立了一個新的生活節奏：工作六天，休息一天。安息日的意義不只是停止勞動，而且是讓人休息、專心敬拜神。神後來在律法中也定出有關敬拜的規條。這帶出第四個屬靈功課：工作有時，敬拜有時。我們大多數人一週工作五天，比以色列人還幸福！人的身心都需要適作的休息。但我們該如何度過週末呢？享受嗜好、陪伴家人當然無可厚非。除此之外，我們也應當把敬拜放在主日的優先的位置。那是我們與弟兄姐妹一同讚美神的時刻，也是幫助我們在新的一週調整我們的焦點，專注於神。藉此提醒我們：神是我們生命的主。我們珍惜與主的關係，因為祂是一切祝福的源頭。

3. 隨時的證明 Timeless Proof

因著神的信實，一場糧食危機得以化解。然而，神不希望祂的百姓忘記這件事，因此祂吩咐他們保留一個記號，作為祂恩典隨時的證明。讓我們來讀第 33 至 35 節。神吩咐祂的子民保存一俄梅珥的嗎哪，讓後代子孫能夠看見。這罐嗎哪要「存在耶和華面前」，所指的是約櫃。出埃及記第 25 章記載了建造約櫃的說明。約櫃象徵神的同在，是極其神聖的物件，只有大祭司一年一次能靠近它。或許他們會在某些節期將嗎哪拿出來給百姓觀看。神奇妙地保存這罐嗎哪多年不會變壞，就像祂在安息日前一天保存嗎哪一樣。這罐嗎哪成了給後代的實物教材，一方面見證神對他們祖先的信實。神在曠野中餵養他們。在其他時候，神也吩咐以色列人保存一些物品，以記念祂的作為。例如，當他們過約旦河進入迦南地之後，神吩咐他們在河岸上立十二塊石頭作為記號。約書亞在約書亞記 4:6-7 解釋原因：6「這些石頭在你們中間可以作為證據。日後，你們的子孫問你們說：『這些石頭是什麼意思？』7 你們就對他們說：『這是因為約但河的水在耶和華的約櫃前斷絕；約櫃過約但河的時候，約但河的水就斷絕了。這些石頭要作以色列人永遠的紀念。』」孩子們會問父母或祖父母那些石頭的意義，而長輩就會告訴他們神昔日的作為。出於同樣的理由，人們建造紀念碑與雕像，以追念歷史事件和重要人物。除了紀念神的信實之外，嗎哪也見證了人的失敗。第 35 節預告了一個沉痛的結果：以色列人吃嗎哪共四十年，直到進了有人居住之地，就是迦南的境界。從埃及到迦南，其實不到兩週的路程，為什麼他們卻走了四十年？因為他們懼怕敵人，甚至提議罷免摩西，另立

領袖帶他們回埃及。民數記第 14 章記載了這段故事。結果，神管教他們，讓他們在曠野中兜圈子四十年，直到那一代人全部過去。何等悲哀！然而，在目前嗎哪提醒以色列人記得神的供應。這帶出**第五個**屬靈功課：記念品提醒我們神的恩典。例如，十字架讓我們想到耶穌的受死。有些人把十字架掛在脖子上；教會把它放在建築外牆上或掛在禮拜堂中。基督徒也定期守聖餐，以記念主耶穌的犧牲。你也可以收集一些個人物件，來記念神在你生命中特別時刻的作為。許多人會保存與親人合照的相片、童年家園的照片，或是在重要場合拍的照片。如今我們可以很方便地把照片存在手機裡。不久之前，人們用剪貼簿保存珍貴回憶：例如嬰兒超聲波的掃描、家庭第一次看電影的票、或第一份薪水的支票。我至今仍然保存著醫院寄給我的一些信件，告訴我那時生孩子的醫療費全數免除。那時我並沒有收入，醫院等於是免費送給我兩個孩子！這些物品就像你人生的剪影，也是神的愛的隨時證明。當你回顧那些片段時，你的信心會得到激勵。神過去怎樣信實地帶領你，祂將來也必繼續信實地與你同在。

結論 CONCLUSION

當我們承認神是我們的供應者之時，我們就能懷著感謝與感激的心生活。感恩並不在乎於我們擁有什麼，或是擁有多少。重點是正確的心態，知道一切都是從神而來。最後，讓我與大家分享一首詩，題目叫作《我心感恩》。作者這樣寫道：我為著那位抱怨晚餐不準時的丈夫感恩，這表示他在家裡和我在一起，而不是與別人在外面。我為著那個埋怨洗碗的青少年感恩，這表示她在家裡，而不是在街頭流浪。我為著要繳的稅感恩，這表示我有工作。我為著需要修剪的草坪感恩，這表示我擁有一個家。我為著那些對政府的批評感恩，這表示我們有言論自由。我為著在教會裡那位唱歌走音的姊妹感恩，這表示我的聽覺沒問題。我為著清晨響起的鬧鐘感恩，這表示我還活著。當我們專注於自己擁有的，而不是缺乏的東西，我們便能夠感謝與感激。當你離開這個地方時，你要為這棟老舊的建築感恩，因為這是你屬靈的家。當你坐進車裡時，你要為神賜給你的交通工具感恩。當你回到家時，你要為神所賜的家人與住所感恩。當你明天早晨醒來時，你要為神賜給你新的恩典感恩。