

PLANTS OF THE EXODUS

The Old Testament Scriptures are full of many tremendous historic events. There are wars that changed the history of nations. There are cities burned by fire from heaven. There is one event, however, which receives attention in an entire book of the Bible. It is the great *Exodus*.

This great event, carried out by the hand of Almighty God, has been depicted often in books, paintings, and even movies. The history of the Israelites moving from Egypt up to the Land of Canaan is full of miracles and exciting scenes that cause us to recognize the power of God to fulfill His promises.

It all began when Jacob's son Joseph was in Egypt many years before. Pharaoh had made him second-in-command (Gen 41:43). When famine came to the world, Joseph was responsible for providing grain to those who needed it. Jacob (Israel) and his descendants moved down from Canaan to survive the famine. The Israelites ended up becoming slaves of the Egyptians (Ex 1) and four hundred years after they had come down to Egypt they still had not returned to Canaan—the land promised by God to Abraham and his offspring.

God called his servant Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and back to the freedom of Canaan (Ex 3). Pharaoh was not inclined to let the people leave Egypt, but after God sent numerous plagues including the killing of all the firstborn Egyptians, Pharaoh relented and let the people go (Ex 12:31-32). For the next 40 years the Israelites worked their way toward Canaan, wandering in the Sinai Peninsula.

THE SEEDS OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE

After the Israelites left Egypt they were pursued by Pharaoh and his armies, but the Lord protected them in the miraculous parting of the Red Sea. The Lord continued to protect and provide for them in many different ways over the next years. Imagine the task of moving over one million people on a march through the wilderness! When the people needed protection and direction, the Lord provided a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. When there was no water, the Lord provided water. Even their shoes didn't

wear out by divine miracle! When they needed food, the Lord provided food:



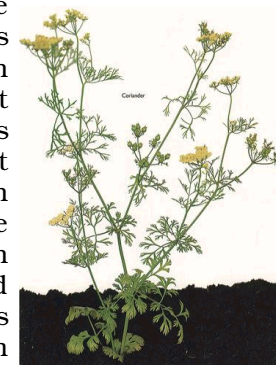
Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day . . ." (Ex 16:4)

It was an amazing way for the Lord to provide for the people. This bread from heaven (also known as manna) would come down for them six days a week to keep them alive in the desert.

We don't have an example of manna in existence today, but we do have an herb in common use today that can serve to remind us of the manna eaten by the Israelites in the desert—and remind us of God's protection and care for his people.

"The manna was like coriander seed and looked like resin . . ." (Num 11:7; Ex 16:31)

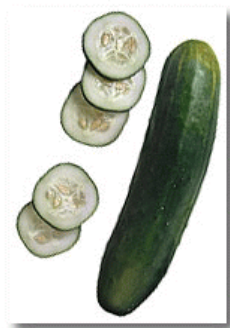
Coriander seed is well known throughout the Holy Land. Cultivated wild, it was used for years as a condiment and a medicine. Coriander is an annual that grows from one and a half to two feet high. Its foliage is known more commonly as *cilantro*. Being a member of the parsley family, it is easy to grow in most gardens. Seeds are sown in autumn or early spring, depending on the climate. About midsummer, the seed heads ripen on the foliage and the seeds can be harvested before they fall to the ground¹. The plant is primarily grown for its seeds, although fresh cilantro is commonly used in cooking as well.



The highly aromatic seeds are popular in a variety of uses and have even been found buried in Egyptian tombs (presumably as an "air freshener.")

¹

Harvest leaves of young plants before they bolt to use in Mexican, Caribbean, and oriental dishes. Collect seed when it begins to turn brown in summer. Dry in a warm, airy place over a cloth or hang upside-down to dry inside a paper bag. Rub a handful of seeds between your hands to release the edible seed from the seed coat. Freeze seeds for 48 hours before storing in an airtight jar in a cool, dark place. Use ground seeds in cooking.



The Chinese traditionally use the whole herb (or the oil) for medicinal purposes. It is suitable for relieving headaches as well as muscle pain.²

While the manna the Israelites received was not coriander seed, the Bible mentions twice that it looked similar to coriander. May this plant in our “Bible Garden” be a reminder to us of the way God

provides for the daily needs of His people.

THE SEEDS OF DISCONTENT— CUCUMBER, GARLIC, AND ONION

These three also play a part in the “plants of the Exodus,” but the situation in which they are mentioned is sad. The Israelites began to get tired of what God was doing for them in the wilderness. They complained that what He had given them to eat was getting “boring.” They didn’t want the manna anymore. In fact, they claimed that they wanted to go back to Egypt. How sad it must have been for the Lord to hear His people mention cucumber, garlic, and onion as they did in Numbers 11:4-5,

The rabble with the Israelites began to crave other food, and again the Israelites [said] . . . We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers . . . onions and garlic.

How sad that the Israelites were willing to go back to slavery just to have the food they wanted. Were cucumbers, onions, and garlic really that important?

The cucumbers mentioned in the Bible were the same species grown in our own gardens today. It is thought that cucumbers originated in India and moved westward into the Middle East and the Mediterranean.

Scripture Study

Psalm 145:15-16

Matthew 6:11

John 6:25-58

However, the plant has been in cultivation so long that nobody really knows who introduced it where. In Egypt and Palestine where the summers were hot, the cucumber was prized for its cool, refreshing juices.

Garlic is a strong scented plant of the lily family with white, yellow, rose, or purplish flowers. The garlic mentioned in the Bible is the common variety familiar to us. It is a perennial growing about twelve inches high. The small cloves which make up the rather large bulbs are generally the cultivated portion of the plant.

The garlic plant has a long history and many stories and legends are associated with it³. Suffice it to say here that in Bible times it was among the most popular of seasonings and its uses were many including as an antiseptic. The onion (a relative of garlic) mentioned by the Israelites is also the onion we know today. It is said that the onions of Egypt are generally sweeter than ours. The species known as the *shallot* is often listed as that for which the Israelites longed.



As you look on the cucumber, garlic, and onion, remember how the Israelites were ready to choose them over the Lord’s deliverance from slavery. Pray that our discontent be turned aside through the joy of knowing Jesus and what He did for us on the cross.



There is a curious superstition in some parts of Europe, that if a morsel of the bulb be chewed by a man running a race it will prevent his competitors from getting ahead of him, and Hungarian jockeys will sometimes fasten a clove of Garlic to the bits of their horses in the belief that any other racers running close to those thus baited, will fall back the instant they smell the offensive odour.

² Recipe: Coriander Muscle Rub

Add 2 drops coriander, 4 drops juniper, 4 drops black pepper to 4 teaspoons (20ml.) grapeseed oil, and massage into tired and aching muscles.