“That Is What YHWH Said,” Moses Elaborates on God’s Command About Manna

Moses gives several instructions to the Israelites concerning manna: How it should be gathered, prepared, consumed, and preserved, and what to do with it on Shabbat. The phrasing and details of these instructions are Moses’ creative elaboration of God’s original laconic command.

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*The Gathering of Manna (in Baskets and Pots),* Print maker: Jacob Folkema  1791

After leaving Egypt, the Israelites start traveling in the wilderness and complain that they are dying of hunger. In response, God tells Moses that he is going to rain down food from heaven daily, and gives some instructions about what to do:

שמות טז:ד וַיֹּאמֶר יְ־הֹוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה הִנְנִי מַמְטִיר לָכֶם לֶחֶם מִן הַשָּׁמָיִם וְיָצָא הָעָם וְלָקְטוּ דְּבַר יוֹם בְּיוֹמוֹ לְמַעַן אֲנַסֶּנּוּ הֲיֵלֵךְ בְּתוֹרָתִי אִם לֹא.טז:ה וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי וְהֵכִינוּ אֵת אֲשֶׁר יָבִיאוּ וְהָיָה מִשְׁנֶה עַל אֲשֶׁר יִלְקְטוּ יוֹם יוֹם.

Exod 16:4 And YHWH said to Moses, “I will rain down food for you from the sky, and the people shall go out and gather each day that day’s portion—that I may thus test them, to see whether they will follow My instructions or not. 16:5 But on the sixth day, when they apportion what they will bring in, it must be double the amount they gather each day.” (NJPS, adjusted)

The command here has three elements:

1. The people should gather the food from the sky (=manna) daily.
2. God would like to test whether the Israelites follow his instructions or not.
3. On Friday, the people should gather double.[1]

When the food appears the next day, the people are confused about what it is and Moses explains:

שמות טז:טו…וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֲלֵהֶם הוּא הַלֶּחֶם אֲשֶׁר נָתַן יְ־הֹוָה לָכֶם לְאָכְלָה.

Exod 16:15 … And Moses said to them, “That is the food which YHWH has given you to eat….”

From this point on, Moses offers the Israelites a series of instructions in piecemeal fashion.

Moses’ First Command: Gather an *Omer* per Person

Moses’ first instruction about the manna is as follows:

שמות טז:טז זֶה הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְ־הֹוָה לִקְטוּ מִמֶּנּוּ אִישׁ לְפִי אָכְלוֹ עֹמֶר לַגֻּלְגֹּלֶת מִסְפַּר נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם אִישׁ לַאֲשֶׁר בְּאָהֳלוֹ תִּקָּחוּ.

Exod 16:16 “…This is what YHWH has commanded: ‘Gather as much of it as each of you requires to eat, an *omer* to a person for as many of you as there are; each of you shall fetch for those in his tent.’”[2]

Moses states that his words are “what YHWH has commanded,” and they certainly relate to God’s statement that “the people shall go out and gather each day that day’s portion” (וְיָצָא הָעָם וְלָקְטוּ דְּבַר יוֹם בְּיוֹמוֹ). Yet Moses’ version contains two innovations:

1. An *Omer* per Head – God’s command mentions a daily portion, but never specifies an amount. Moses, however, presents God as having set the proper amount at an *omer* per head.

2. Head of household gathers – The divine communication implies that all the Israelites were to go out and gather manna for themselves (וְיָצָא הָעָם, “the people shall go out”), but Moses charges only the *paterfamilias* to do so on behalf of the household.

However we are to understand these divergences (more on this later), we are told that the Israelites follow Moses’ instructions:

שמות טז:יז וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵן בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּלְקְטוּ הַמַּרְבֶּה וְהַמַּמְעִיט.טז:יחוַיָּמֹדּוּ בָעֹמֶר וְלֹא הֶעְדִּיף הַמַּרְבֶּה וְהַמַּמְעִיט לֹא הֶחְסִיר אִישׁ לְפִי אָכְלוֹ לָקָטוּ.

Exod 16:17 The Israelites did so, some gathering much, some little. 18 They measured it by the *omer*, he who had gathered much had no excess, and he who had gathered little had no deficiency: they had gathered as much as they needed to eat.

The exact sequence of events here is debated,[3] but we see that the Israelites make use of the *omer* measurement as Moses had specified.

Moses’ Second Command: Don’t Leave Leftovers

Moses next issues a second command about the manna:

שמות טז:יט וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֲלֵהֶם אִישׁ אַל יוֹתֵר מִמֶּנּוּ עַד בֹּקֶר.

Exod 16:19 And Moses said to them, “Let no one leave any of it over until morning.”

God in v. 4 had not explicitly forbidden leaving manna over to the next day, but merely stated that the Israelites should “gather each day that day’s portion” (וְלָקְטוּ דְּבַר יוֹם בְּיוֹמוֹ). Perhaps Moses’ phrasing it this way is his attempt to fulfill God’s wish to test the people’s loyalty, which Moses may interpret as testing their faith in whether God would provide additional manna the next day.

At any rate, the Israelites do not comply:

שמות טז:כ וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֶל מֹשֶׁה וַיּוֹתִרוּ אֲנָשִׁים מִמֶּנּוּ עַד בֹּקֶר וַיָּרֻם תּוֹלָעִים וַיִּבְאַשׁ וַיִּקְצֹף עֲלֵהֶם מֹשֶׁה.

Exod 16:20 But they paid no attention to Moses; some of them left of it until morning, and it became infested with maggots and stank. And Moses was angry with them.

Despite Moses’ warning, the people were uncertain whether manna would fall the next day and kept some extra food just in case. Moses becomes angry with the people, though how or if this was expressed is unrecorded; perhaps the maggot-infested, stinky leftovers made the point clear enough.

Moses’ Third Command: Leave the Sixth Day’s Second Portion Uncooked

The Israelites continue to gather manna daily until day six:

שמות טז:כא וַיִּלְקְטוּ אֹתוֹ בַּבֹּקֶר בַּבֹּקֶר אִישׁ כְּפִי אָכְלוֹ וְחַם הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְנָמָס.טז:כב וַיְהִי בַּיּוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי לָקְטוּ לֶחֶם מִשְׁנֶה שְׁנֵי הָעֹמֶר לָאֶחָד וַיָּבֹאוּ כָּל נְשִׂיאֵי הָעֵדָה וַיַּגִּידוּ לְמֹשֶׁה.

Exod 16:21 So they gathered it every morning, each as much as he needed to eat; for when the sun grew hot, it would melt.16:22 On the sixth day they gathered double the amount of food, two *omer*s for each, and all the chieftains of the community came and told Moses.

Again, the sequence of events is a matter of debate: did Moses command the people to gather double or did they do this as a consequence of double the usual amount appearing on the ground?[4] Either way, the Israelites do not seem to know why they were to gather double on Friday. Thus, after the chieftains’ report to Moses that the Israelites had gathered the double portion, apparently awaiting explanation or further instructions, Moses explains about Shabbat:

שמות טז:כג וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם הוּא אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְ־הֹוָה שַׁבָּתוֹן שַׁבַּת קֹדֶשׁ לַי־הֹוָה מָחָר אֵת אֲשֶׁר תֹּאפוּ אֵפוּ וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר תְּבַשְּׁלוּ בַּשֵּׁלוּ וְאֵת כָּל הָעֹדֵף הַנִּיחוּ לָכֶם לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת עַד הַבֹּקֶר.

Exod 16:23 He said to them, “This is what YHWH said: ‘Tomorrow is a day of rest, a holy sabbath of YHWH.’ Bake what you would bake and boil what you would boil; and all that is left put aside to be kept until morning.”[5]

Moses tells them that the next day is a holy day, and that this is why they gathered double. Thus, they should cook as much as they want for their Friday meal, and leave the rest over to be eaten on Saturday. Again, Moses claims that YHWH had said this (הוּא אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְ־הֹוָה, “This is what YHWH said”), though nothing in God’s speech mentions Shabbat, only that the people should gather double the amount on Friday.

Did God Say These Things?

How are we to understand Moses’ consistently quoting words in the name of God that do not appear in God’s speech in vv. 4-5? Traditional commentators have taken two basic stances:

1. Full Articulation of Previous Shorthand Quote

The first possibility is that the report of the divine command in verses 4-5 are a shortened version of what God said to Moses, which is quoted in full by Moses only later in the story. This position is taken by R. Saʿadiah Gaon (882–942) in his commentary on Exodus:

הוא אשר דבר ה’ – והנה לא מצאנו בכתוב מפורש, אבל השליח שמע זאת מן השולח יתברך ויתעלה לפני זה, אלא שלא אמר להם מקודם.

“This is what God said” – We do not find that this is written explicitly, but the messenger (=Moses) surely heard it from the sender (=God), may he be blessed and uplifted, beforehand, but he (=Moses) didn’t relate it to them until now.

וזהו מה שמוכיח שישנן מצות רבות ששמע אותם משה יתעלה, ולא הזכירם אלא לאחר זמן. כמו מה שאמר אלעזר זאת חקת התורה כו’ (במדבר לא, כא) ואין אנחנו מוצאים דבר זה מפורש בכתוב וכמו כל המצוות והמשפטים הכתובים במשנה תורה, שהגיע להשליח מאלהים ולא כתב אותם בספרים הקודמים…

This goes to prove that there are many commandments that Moses heard but didn’t mention until much later, like what Elazar said, “This is the law of the Torah” (Num 31:21), even though we don’t find it explicitly in the text, and like all the commandments and laws written in Deuteronomy that arrived from God to the messenger and he never wrote them in the earlier books…

In short, according to Saʿadia, the Torah often quotes God in shorthand or not at all, only to have the revelation expressed later by a human speaker in God’s name.

2. Human Interpretation of the Shorter Divine

Another possibility is that God’s speech in vv. 4-5 is what God actually said, and Moses’ many commands reflect his interpretation and elaboration of God’s statement. This is the approach taken by Abraham ibn Ezra (1089–1167) in explaining the conflicting explanations for Shabbat in the two versions of the Decalogue.

He argues (Long Commentary, Exod 20:1) that whereas the Shabbat command in Exodus (20:8-11), grounded in the creation of the world, reflects God’s own explanation, the one in Deuteronomy (5:12-15), grounded in the exodus from Egypt, reflects Moses’ innovative interpretation. Even though only the Exodus version of the Decalogue presents the unalloyed word of God that was inscribed on the tablets, Moses’ new interpretation is still presented as “the words spoken by God” (v. 19/22) since it was a legitimate extension and interpretation of those words.

Although ibn Ezra does not apply that explanation to Moses’ speeches about the manna,[6] I would argue that in all the above instances, we should understand Moses as putting into words what God means to say to the Israelites, even if God never actually said this in so many words.

As I argued in my [“‘That Is What YHWH Said,’ Moses Interprets Nadav and Avihu’s Death,”](https://thetorah.com/that-is-what-yhwh-said-moses-interprets-nadav-and-avihus-death/) (*TheTorah.com*, 2018) this is the meaning of the phrase “that is what YHWH said” (הוּא אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְ־הֹוָה ) in the story of the death of Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:1-3).[7] God never actually said the words Moses quotes, “Through those near to Me I will be sanctified and be glorified before all the people” (בִּקְרֹבַי אֶקָּדֵשׁ וְעַל פְּנֵי כָל הָעָם אֶכָּבֵד). These words instead reflect the essence of what God was trying to communicate through his execution of these men.

Applying this to Moses’ command in v. 23, God is telling us, Moses explains, that tomorrow, the seventh day, is a sacred day in which YHWH ceases from activity; that is why he had you gather a double portion on the sixth day.

Moreover, when God first tells Moses in verse 4 that He wants to test and determine whether or not the Israelites will follow “his teaching,” (תורה), the *torah* of which He speaks is still not fully defined. God invites Moses to create the commandments that will represent the Torah that is attributed to God.

The Israelites Follow Moses’ Command

Despite their previous negative experience with leaving manna overnight, the Israelites comply and leave it over from Friday for Shabbat:

שמות טז:כד וַיַּנִּיחוּ אֹתוֹ עַד הַבֹּקֶר כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה מֹשֶׁה וְלֹא הִבְאִישׁ וְרִמָּה לֹא הָיְתָה בּוֹ.

Exod 16:24 So they put it aside until morning, as Moses had ordered; and it did not turn foul, and there were no maggots in it.

The text describes Israel’s compliance with Moses’ (not YHWH’s) command. This obedience is “blessed” with success since, from now on, the Israelites know that they can leave over the sixth day’s second portion for the seventh day and nothing will happen to it, since God uniquely preserves this manna.[8]

Moses’ Fourth Command: No Manna Will Fall on the Seventh Day

The next day, on Shabbat itself, Moses issues his fourth command about the manna:

שמות טז:כה וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אִכְלֻהוּ הַיּוֹם כִּי שַׁבָּת הַיּוֹם לַי־הֹוָה הַיּוֹם לֹא תִמְצָאֻהוּ בַּשָּׂדֶה. טז:כו שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תִּלְקְטֻהוּ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לֹא יִהְיֶה בּוֹ.

Exod 16:25 Then Moses said, “Eat it today, for today is a sabbath of YHWH; you will not find it today on the plain.16:26 Six days you shall gather it; on the seventh day, the sabbath, there will be none.”

God’s message to Moses in verses 4-5 doesn’t say explicitly that manna will not fall on Saturday. It only states that double the amount will be allotted on Friday. Instead, Moses deduces this just as he deduced the reason for the anomaly of the double portion as being because of the holiness of Shabbat. Moreover, Moses doesn’t actually say that the Israelites may not look for manna on Shabbat, he only says that they should eat what they have because no manna will fall that day. Nevertheless, the attempt to gather manna would be a clear expression of doubt in Moses’ prophetic knowledge.

The Israelites Violate Moses’ Command but God Rebukes Moses

At least some Israelites ignore Moses’ directive:

שמות טז:כז וַיְהִי בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי יָצְאוּ מִן הָעָם לִלְקֹט וְלֹא מָצָאוּ.

Exod 16:27 Yet some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found nothing.

Although we may have expected Moses to be angry, as he was earlier when the people left over manna until morning (v. 20), it is YHWH who suddenly appears to Moses and speaks up:

שמות טז:כח וַיֹּאמֶר יְ־הֹוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה עַד אָנָה מֵאַנְתֶּם לִשְׁמֹר מִצְו‍ֹתַי וְתוֹרֹתָי.טז:כט רְאוּ כִּי יְ־הֹוָה נָתַן לָכֶם הַשַּׁבָּת עַל כֵּן הוּא נֹתֵן לָכֶם בַּיּוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי לֶחֶם יוֹמָיִם שְׁבוּ אִישׁ תַּחְתָּיו אַל יֵצֵא אִישׁ מִמְּקֹמוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי.

Exod 16:28 YHWH said to Moses, “How long will you men refuse to obey My commandments and My teachings? 16:29Mark that YHWH has given you the sabbath; therefore He gives you two days’ food on the sixth day. Let everyone remain where he is: let no one leave his place on the seventh day.”[9]

Several problems present themselves in this text:

1. Why does God address Moses in anger when Moses himself did nothing wrong?
2. Why is God addressing Moses with “מֵאַנְתֶּם” (“you refuse”) in the plural?
3. Why does God continually refer to himself in the third person, “Mark that YHWH has given you the sabbath; therefore, He gives you two days’ food on the sixth day.…”?
4. Israel’s previous disobedience is described as not listening to Moses, and Moses gets angry. Why here does God suddenly get involved and speak as if he has become exasperated with Israel *again* ignoring *him*, as if he has brought this up before?

The answer appears to be that the addition of YHWH here is a redactional supplement; originally it was Moses’ speech directed to the people (redaction in italics and crossed out):

שמות טז:כח וַיֹּאמֶר *~~יְ־הֹוָה אֶל~~* מֹשֶׁה עַד אָנָה מֵאַנְתֶּם לִשְׁמֹר מִצְו‍ֹתַי וְתוֹרֹתָי.

Exod 16:28 Said *~~YHWH to~~* Moses, “How long will you men refuse to obey My commandments and My teachings?”

Thus, the anger with the people that *Moses* expresses in verses 28-29 parallels that which is stated in wake of the first disobedience of verse 20.[10] Why was the passaged redacted?

In the original text, Moses refers to the command to “stay where they are on the seventh day” as “his commands and instructions.” YHWH may have sanctified the seventh day, but it is Moses, interpreting this act, who sets the rules for how to observe Shabbat, telling the people to remain in their homes. A later editor, who did not want to attribute Israel’s cessation from work on the Sabbath to Moses, altered verse 28 to make the speech YHWH’s and not Moses’.

YHWH’s Commandments: Not Moses’ Commandments

This editorial adjustment of Moses’ laws to YHWH’s laws is found in other places in the Bible. The same occurs with the move from Moses’ commandments to God’s commandments in the later layers of Deuteronomy.[11]

A particularly clear example of this phenomenon is how the LXX changes “my commands” to “his commands” in Deut 11:13:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Deut 11:13 (MT) | Deut 11:13 (LXX) |
| If, then, you obey my commandments that I enjoin upon you this day… | Now if by hearing you hear all his commandments that I command you today… |
| וְהָיָה אִם שָׁמֹעַ תִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶל מִצְו‍ֹתַי אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם… | ἐὰν δὲ ἀκοῇ εἰσακούσητε πάσας τὰς ἐντολὰςαὐτοῦ ὅσας ἐγὼ ἐντέλλομαί σοι σήμερον… |

The translator apparently found the expression “my commandments” put in Moses’ mouth to be problematic and adjusted it accordingly.[12]

Moses’ Interpretations = God’s Commands

In sum, most of the commands issued by Moses in Exodus 16 are presented as his own creative elaboration of the rather laconic divine communication of verses 4–5. For Exodus 16, all of the commandments are both “my commands and teachings” (מצותי ותורתי) of Moses (verse 28) and “my teachings” (תורתי) of God (verse 4) at one and the same time. Since Moses is God’s closest representative, the commandments that he creates are, ipso facto, God’s commandments.

[View Footnotes](https://www.thetorah.com/article/that-is-what-yhwh-said-moses-elaborates-on-gods-command-about-manna)

1. God explains to Moses that “this” is so that the people may be tested, to see whether they follow God’s commands. It is unclear whether Israel’s fidelity will be determined by keeping the first command, the second command, or both.
2. Most scholars attribute verses 4-5, 27-30, to the non-Priestly source and verses 15-26, 31-36 to the Priestly source. My own reconstruction of the non-Priestly material differs slightly (vv. 4-5, 21, 27, 28\* [perhaps only ויאמר משה], 29-30.) Nevertheless, while there may also have been an early-P text that was quite brief, in my view, most of the Priestly material in Exod 16 constitutes an exegetical expansion of the non-Priestly source. In other words, the bulk of the P layer is an interpretive elaboration of J and not an independent source. For this reason, it can only be analyzed together with the non-Priestly material, which is what I do in this piece. The changes noted above may thus reflect a Priestly concern to emphasize the equal quantity of provision given to each Israelite (contra Num 11:32) and the dominant position of the head of the household.
3. The most common assumption is that the measuring happened later, and that this shows either how precise their gathering was (Rashbam, ibn Ezra) or that God was miraculously intervening (Rashi). Bekhor Shor also believes the measuring happened later, but he reads v. 18 as saying that if the measuring showed that the gathering had been imprecise, the people would fix it by returning some manna or gathering more. In contrast, R. Menachem ben Shlomo (*Midrash Sekhel Tov*) and R. Abraham ben HaRambam suggest that v. 18 simply describes the process of gathering that occurred outside, that they followed Moses’ command to the letter and instead of estimating, they measured as they gathered. This follows the understanding of והכינו את אשר יביאו of verse 5 as meaning “they shall measure that which they intend to bring in.” This interpretation of verse 18 seems simplest and therefore, best. The interpretation of Rashi, that the people miraculously and unintentionally gathered precisely the amount they were supposed to gather corresponds poorly with the note that the Israelites did as they were told to do. The idea that they were amazingly precise in their estimations seems strange. Why would the text highlight such a point? And the idea that they would return to the field after measuring the manna at home to correct miscalculations is unnecessarily cumbersome.
4. Rashi and Rashbam assume that the people went out to gather and saw double the amount, and having gathered double asked Moses what was happening and what they should do. According to this, Moses had not yet told them about the double gathering on Fridays that God had already informed him of. Rashbam even suggests that Moses was using the surprise appearance of double manna for its dramatic effect in underscoring the importance of Shabbat. The opposite interpretation is offered by ibn Ezra and ibn Kaspi, who suggest that the text is assuming that Moses has informed the people that they should gather double, even though this is not recorded in the text, but that Moses has not yet told them why. The people do so, and then come to Moses for an explanation and instruction. As the manna became maggot-infested and stinky the last time they left any overnight, they are understandably unsure what to do. This latter interpretation seems to me to be more likely.
5. The text is not clear about where God’s statement ends. Is the entire quote meant to be God’s words or is the quotation only the first sentence about Shabbat, followed by the statement about baking from Moses?  I have punctuated the English in line with the second reading, though the NJPS punctuates along with the first.
6. I have thus far found no traditional commentators who do apply this to the manna.
7. Again, ibn Ezra does not apply his understanding of the Decalogue to this example either.
8. Moshe Weinfeld highlights the significance of this compliance by noting that Moses specifically told them to leave the extra manna uncooked. He suggests that if they had cooked it all in advance, they may have believed that this process helped preserve the manna from going bad. Again, it may be that Moses wishes to test their faith in line with God’s statement in v. 4. But when they follow his instructions and find that the uncooked manna indeed failed to breed worms, they learned that the Friday-Saturday manna is a miraculous divine provision. A possible implication of Weinfeld’s reading is that the Israelites would not have to leave the second portion uncooked each week. This was only required the first week to prove the point. See, Moshe Weinfeld, *The Place of the Law in the Religion of Ancient Israel,* Vetus Testamentum Supplement 100 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 122.
9. The section concludes in verse 30 with the affirmation that, following God’s rebuke, the Israelites ceased work on the seventh day.

שמות טז:ל וַיִּשְׁבְּתוּ הָעָם בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִעִי.

Exod 16:30 So the people remained inactive on the seventh day.

1. Since that was the first incident of Israel’s disobedience, Moses’s anger is not dramatized. With the second violation Moses, running out of patience, states, “How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions?”
2. See my [“Moses’ Commandments: The Secret of Nissim of Marseilles,”](http://thetorah.com/moses-commandments-the-secret-of-nissim-of-marseilles/) *TheTorah.com* (2015).
3. A similar redaction occurs with Joshua’s circumcision of the Israelites in the book of Joshua. The text originally presented this as Joshua’s idea, but it was edited to have God issuing the statement. See my, [“Joshua Circumcises Israel in Response to Egypt’s Scorn,”](https://thetorah.com/joshua-circumcises-israel-in-response-to-egypts-scorn/)*TheTorah.com* (2018).