

# **MEAT/BREAD AS A PARALLEL WORD-PAIR IN BIBLICAL POETRY: A KEY TO UNDERSTANDING EXODUS 16:1-15**

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Exodus 16 relates a story about how the Lord supplied the people of Israel with food in the desert. The chapter's organization is very complex, and commentators both medieval and modern have been hard-pressed to present consistent and convincing explanations of these complexities.

A number of problems in Exodus 16 arise due to the three mentions of *basar* [meat] and *lehem* [bread], and the appearance of the quails. Three verses in the first part of the chapter refer to both meat and bread: the third part of the first half of v. 3 (v. 3a3), the first part of the first half of v. 8 (v. 8a1) and the second part of the first half of v. 12 (v. 12a2). Verse 3 records the Israelites' complaint against Moses and Aaron; as part of that complaint, the people say that they would rather have died in Egypt "when we sat by the meat-pot, when we ate bread to satiety"<sup>1</sup> than die of hunger in the desert. In v. 8a1 Moses mentions that the Lord will provide meat for the people in the evening and bread for them in the morning; in v. 12a2, the Lord Himself tells Moses that He will do this. Finally, v. 13a reports that quails arrived in the camp.

Both classical Jewish and modern academic commentators understand the three references to "meat" and "bread" literally, which is the way the subsequent verses 13-15 seem to understand them. After v. 13a reports the arrival of the quails in the evening, vv. 13b-14 report that in the morning a strange substance is found on the ground and in v. 15 it is identified by Moses as the promised "bread." It is perhaps a bit odd that the text does not explicitly identify the quails as the promised meat, leaving the reader to infer this; however, we could explain this by saying that the quails are obviously meat, whereas the manna is a new substance completely unlike any bread the people knew, and therefore Moses had to explain that this was indeed the promised bread.

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However, this literal understanding of “meat” and “bread” creates a number of problems that aren’t so easy to resolve. The people’s complaint and Moses’ and the Lord’s promises in vv. 3-12 give equal weight to both “meat” and “bread.” However, the text that follows does the exact opposite. It contains a half-verse report that the quails arrived, and then the entire rest of the chapter deals exclusively with the manna and the instructions connected with it. It is remarkable that absolutely no attention is paid to the meat/quails by the text except to mention their appearance in passing! Not only that, but the quails vanish from the text *immediately* after they are first mentioned, literally in the middle of the same verse in which they appear; how can we explain that? Why is there no report that the people gathered and *ate* the quails (cf. Numbers 11:32-33), whereas the text goes into great detail about how the people gathered and ate the manna? Why is the manna used as a means to test and train the people to follow the Lord’s commands, whereas the quails are not? And finally, why do the quails apparently come only once, whereas the manna comes regularly from then on?

Many modern commentators (see for example Martin Noth<sup>2</sup> and Brevard Childs<sup>3</sup> and the commentators they cite) have noted that there is indeed an annual quail migration that occurs over the Sinai peninsula during the spring and fall, and that this natural fact may be reflected in both our text and in the story of the Lord’s sending of quails in Numbers 11. However, even if the people did receive quails during their wanderings in the Sinai, the questions I raised above regarding how the story in Exodus 16 *portrays* the appearance of the quails and their extremely marginal role in that story still need to be addressed.

In this article, I will review past attempts to deal with these questions, and show why those attempts are inadequate. I will then show that the words “meat” and “bread” occur in several places in the Hebrew Bible as a pair in prose and poetry, and that in those texts these words can be understood to be functioning with a figurative meaning. Finally, I will show that all three of the instances of this word-pair in Exodus 16 are part of poetic bicola (couplets) embedded in the prose narrative of the chapter. Understanding them figuratively rather than literally will allow us to resolve the problems I have noted.

## PAST ATTEMPTS TO ADDRESS THESE PROBLEMS

The medieval Jewish commentators assume, of course, that all of Exodus 16 was written by one author. Rashi, Ibn Ezra and Ramban all take the words “meat” and “bread” literally; however, while the first two do not address the problems raised above, Ramban does deal with them to some extent in his comments to v. 12. He writes that the ancient rabbis believed that, aside from the Sabbath, the quails came every evening after they first arrived just as the manna fell every morning. He finds this reasonable, since (according to him) the people ask for both in v. 3, and the Lord states that He heard their complaints (presumably about the lack of both) in v. 12; why would the Lord have sent the quails one evening only and then stopped sending them? The reason the subject of the quails disappears from the text, according to Ramban, is that their arrival was something that the Lord arranged to occur naturally and thus involved no great miracle; the rest of the chapter therefore focuses exclusively on the miraculous food that fell from heaven.

However, Ramban does not account for the strange fact that there is no statement in the text (not even a hint!) that the quails continued to come every evening from then on, just as the manna did in the mornings. Furthermore, when the issue of meat/quails comes up again in Numbers 11, it is presented as though it were a new issue with no hint that the quails had been coming every evening all along, and Ramban addresses this fact neither here nor in Numbers 11. He does not offer an explanation as to why the text doesn't indicate that the people ate the quails or why they aren't used to test or train the people. Finally, even if Ramban's explanation of why the subject of the quails disappears from the text is reasonable, it does not explain why the quails disappear from the narrative so abruptly.

Most of the modern scholars of the Bible that I consulted also believe that Exodus 16:1-15 belong to the P document (except for vv. 4-5, which they usually assign to the J document) and were thus composed by one author; in addition, they also understand the words “meat” and “bread” literally. Noth<sup>4</sup> argues that there were older traditions (oral or written) about the Lord having sent the people both meat and bread, separately or together, which were then used by the Pentateuchal authors here and in Numbers 11. In Exodus 16, the P author combined these meat and bread traditions to show how the people were fed with both from the beginning of their stay in the desert.

Although Noth doesn't offer any solutions to the questions I have raised, George Coats<sup>5</sup> bases himself on Noth's views in an attempt to deal with these problems. Coats argues that in Exodus 16, P brought together two distinct traditions; one tradition held that the Lord provided the people with both meat *and* bread at the same time (vv. 2-3 and 6-13), and a second tradition held that the Lord provided them with bread/manna alone (vv. 14-26). The first of these may also be reflected in Psalm 105:40<sup>6</sup>, and the second of them is also present in the J story contained in Numbers 11.<sup>7</sup>

According to Coats, vv. 13a and 13b are parallel to each other: *In the evening quail appeared and covered the camp; in the morning there was a fall of dew about the camp* (NJPS 1999). Since the quails are mentioned parallel to the "fall of dew," the latter would have to be referring to the manna. Coats therefore concludes that v. 13 is the end of the meat-and-bread tradition, reporting how they both arrived, whereas v. 14 starts the manna-alone tradition as a new report of the same event, the "fall of dew." Presumably, the manna-alone tradition was connected (either originally or by subsequent authors) with the testing/training of the people, whereas the tradition including the quails wasn't. The appearance of the quails for the first time in the narrative in v. 13 and their immediate disappearance from it in v. 14 is due to the fact that the meat-and-bread tradition was cut off at the end of v. 13 and the manna-alone tradition was joined to it at that point.

Coats' analysis of v. 13 as a unified verse is problematic for several reasons. First, the parallel nature that he sees between the two half-verses consists of one event (the arrival of the quails) happening "in the evening" and relating to "the camp," and a second event (the fall of dew) happening "in the morning" and relating to "the camp." Although he doesn't explicitly state this, he probably feels that this "evening/morning" parallelism is following up on the evening/morning parallelisms in vv. 8a1 and 12a2. However, the arrival of the quails in the evening is really parallel not to "the fall of dew" but to *the appearance of the strange substance on the ground* in the morning. Coats' belief that the phrase "the fall of dew" refers to the strange substance is extremely difficult to maintain; Coats himself admits that Numbers 11:9 shows that the fall of the dew and the appearance of the manna were clearly separate events. The two events stated in the verse, therefore, aren't really parallel. In addition, the words "evening" and "morning" are not parallel in

the same way as they are in vv. 8a1 and 12a2, where they are functioning as a poetically parallel word-pair with a figurative meaning<sup>8</sup>; it is easier to see v. 13 as a simple prose narration of two things happening in succession, one in the evening and one the next morning.<sup>9</sup> Finally, vv. 13b-15 are easily read as a connected narrative; they report that in the morning, there was a layer of dew on the ground which then evaporated, revealing a strange substance. For all of these reasons, it is difficult to accept vv. 13a and 13b as being a unity. Indeed, Brevard Childs<sup>10</sup> modifies Coats' explanation by arguing that the meat-and-bread tradition includes only v. 13a, whereas vv. 13b-15 are in his view part of the J manna tradition.

A further difficulty exists with both Coats' and Childs' explanations, however. If the meat-and-bread tradition didn't originally mention that the people collected and ate the quails, these commentators' explanations assume that P didn't feel this information was important enough for him to add. On the other hand, if the meat-and-bread tradition *did* originally mention this, their explanations assume that P edited out this piece of the tradition. It is not at all clear why the P author wouldn't have included such an important piece of information, especially since such information would be complementary to the parallel information given in the bread-alone tradition.

The last commentator I will discuss is David Frankel, who also argues that the chapter is composed of two traditions that were edited together,<sup>11</sup> however, he maintains that several verses or parts of verses were added by an even later "supplementer." The supplementer's additions include, among other verses, all the clauses or verses that mention both meat and bread, as well as the quails (vv. 3a3, 8 and 11-13). Frankel believes that the supplementer must have known a tradition that said the Lord supplied the people with quails as well as manna in the desert.<sup>12</sup> The supplementer added these verses about meat-and-bread and the quails to the chapter to make the story "complete." However, Frankel does not address why the supplementer did not report that the people gathered and ate the quails, which would have indicated that the sending of the quails was of equal importance to the sending of the manna. Furthermore, it is remarkable that the pieces of text he added include (as I will show below) three poetic bicola that refer, not to quails, but rather to "meat" and "bread." If his goal was to add the quails to the story, why did he need to add three poetic references to meat *and* bread?

In summary, the commentators I have examined give at best partial answers to the questions I have raised, answers which leave many of these questions unresolved. I believe that a reasonable explanation to all the problems can be arrived at by looking at the meaning of the words “meat” and “bread” in a different way.

#### THE USE OF “BREAD” AND “MEAT” AS A PAIR IN BIBLICAL PROSE

The word *leḥem* [bread] by itself is often used in the Hebrew Bible to mean “food” generally.<sup>13</sup> In addition, in Exodus 16 it is noteworthy that the special food sent by the Lord each morning is not named “manna” until v. 31; from its appearance in v. 15 through v. 30, the substance is referred to simply as “it” except in vv. 15, 22 and 29 where it is called *leḥem*. While it is therefore possible that *leḥem* in this chapter could be understood to mean “bread” (and for that reason Moses had to explain to the people in v. 15 that it was a sort of bread the people had never seen before), the fact that the manna is *not* actually bread at all raises the possibility that the word was meant to be understood as “food.” In light of this, I would pose a further and more extreme question: might the chapter be using the combination of the two words *basar* and *leḥem* in a similar figurative way?

Frankel makes an interesting observation when he states: “In the final form of the story [in Exodus 16], the Israelites receive not only [*leḥem*] but [*basar*] as well, representing a complete meal (Genesis 18:6-7; I Samuel 28:24).”<sup>14</sup> In other words, he suggests that when some form of meat and bread are mentioned together, this may be understood not only literally but also as representing a complete meal. In both of the examples Frankel cites, a host offers to provide a guest with *pat-leḥem* [a bit, or morsel, of bread (NJPS 1999)], a term which the host uses to modestly offer “food,” i.e. a meal. In both cases, that meal includes both some form of meat (a calf) and some form of bread (“cakes” or unleavened bread). In neither case do the actual words “meat” and “bread” occur in the text, and yet both texts present the meat and bread as the main or sole components of the meal.

The descriptions of sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible regularly present some form of meat and bread (with the addition of wine) as what is offered.<sup>15</sup> The actual words “meat” and “bread” are even used in the description of the priestly initiation sacrifice of Aaron and his sons in Exodus 29:32 and its

parallel in Leviticus 8:31-32. Although the various kinds of meat and bread indicated in the descriptions of sacrifice are meant literally, the tradition may have assigned them the role of the essential core of a sacrificial offering precisely because they represent the two major components of a “complete meal.” In addition, we should recall the story of the first sacrifices offered in the Hebrew Bible, those of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4:3-4: one of an animal from a shepherd and one of grain from a farmer. Meat and bread thus also may be seen as representing the two major *kinds* of food: animal-derived and plant-derived.

There is one prose text in the Hebrew Bible in which the actual words “meat” and “bread” occurring together can be seen as having the figurative sense of “food” or “a meal.” In I Kings 17:6, *lehem uvasar* [bread and meat] is used twice as a “composite phrase,” i.e. a pair connected by a conjunction.<sup>16</sup> The first part of I Kings 17 tells the story of how Elijah hid after declaring to King Ahab that rain would fall only if Elijah willed it. Verse 6 relates how Elijah received food and drink while he was in hiding: *The ravens brought him bread and meat [lehem uvasar] in the morning, and bread and meat [lehem uvasar] in the evening, and from the stream did he drink.* It is of course possible that the author of this verse intended for us to take the words “bread” and “meat” literally. However, people in biblical times did not normally eat meat at every meal; meat was reserved for very special occasions.<sup>17</sup> The text may be trying to show us that the Lord fed Elijah *extremely* lavishly, but if so then why is Elijah’s need for drink satisfied by plain water from the stream? If the text were trying to show Elijah as being cared for lavishly, we might have expected the ravens to have brought him wine or milk.<sup>18</sup>

It is at least equally possible that the composite phrase *lehem uvasar* is being used to figuratively convey the idea of “food” or “a meal.”<sup>19</sup> Such a phrase is known as a merism, meaning a phrase in which words indicating individual members of a larger category are connected by “and” and the resultant phrase is used to indicate the general category itself.<sup>20</sup> The expression “bread and meat” may be a merism which makes use of two examples of the category “food,” or a merism in the form of a polar expression which uses the two major contrasting types of food, a food of vegetable origin and a food of animal origin. In either case, the merism would figuratively indicate the general class “food” or “a complete meal.”<sup>21</sup>

One example is not enough to allow us to conclude that a particular phrase functioned as a merism in biblical Hebrew. However, Honeyman noted that merisms are often split apart and used in biblical poetry as parallel terms while retaining their figurative meanings. If the words *lehem* [bread] and *basar* [meat] appear as a parallel word-pair with the figurative sense of “food” or “a meal” in biblical poetry, this would constitute further evidence that the pair may be used as a merism in biblical Hebrew and might constitute one of the traditional word-pair tools used by Israelite poets in constructing their verse.

#### THE USE OF “BREAD/MEAT” AS A PARALLEL PAIR IN BIBLICAL POETRY

The words “bread” and “meat” actually do appear as a poetic parallel pair in two biblical texts: Isaiah 44:19 and Daniel 10:3.

Isaiah 44:9-20 is a poetic diatribe against the worship of idols, in which the poet tries to demonstrate that such worship makes no sense. He describes how idol worshippers cut down a tree to make use of its wood. Part of it they burn to warm themselves and cook their food; the wood is simply a raw material to be consumed and utilized for their own material needs, and they hold complete power over it. But then they fashion the rest of the wood into an idol which they call a “god,” and worship it as something holding power over *them!*

In v. 19, the idol-worshipper describes his use of the fire in the following bicolon: *I baked* [v’af ’afiti] *on its coals* [‘al-gehalav] *bread* [lehem] / *I roasted* [’etzleh] *meat* [basar] *and I ate (it)* [v’ochel]. The existence of both parallelism and rhythm indicate that this is in fact a poetic bicolon. The parallelism can be symbolically rendered ABC / A’C’D (the A/A’ pair consists of “I baked/I roasted” and the C/C’ pair consists of “bread/meat”), and there is a clear 3:3 rhythm (i.e., three stresses per colon).<sup>22</sup>

Although the words “bread” and “meat” *could* be meant literally in this bicolon, we might ask why the poet chooses to use these specific examples as opposed to *other* types of food. There is no essential reason why bread and meat should be singled out over other cooked foods in this context. It is at least possible that the word-pair is a traditional one being used here as the two examples *par excellance* of cooked foods or a meal.



This possibility receives support from the use of the word-pair in Daniel 10:3, where it appears in a poetic bicolon embedded in a prose speech. In the beginning of Daniel 10, Daniel speaks about his three weeks of self-affliction. Verse 3 reads: *Tasty bread* [leḥem ḥamudot] *did I not eat* [lo' 'achalti] / *And meat and wine* [uvasar vayayin] *did not enter my mouth* [lo'-va' 'el-pi]. The AB / A'B' parallelism is evident: “tasty bread” is parallel to “meat and wine,” and “did I not eat” is parallel to “did not enter my mouth.” The bicolon also exhibits a rhythm of four stresses per colon.<sup>23</sup> In light of the word-pair’s use in both I Kings 17:6 and Isaiah 44:19, it is quite possible that these two items are being used as the two examples traditionally used in Israelite poetry to indicate “food,” specifically *rich* food in these particular phrases.<sup>24</sup>

In general, the more examples that exist in biblical prose and poetry of the use of a word-pair with a figurative sense, the more confident we can be that such use did indeed constitute a standard characteristic of biblical Hebrew language and its poetic tradition. In the specific case of bread/meat, we can so far point to one prose example and two poetic examples. However, we have three more examples of the use of this word-pair in Exodus 16. In light of the discussion so far, let us re-examine those uses to see whether they provide additional support for a figurative understanding of this word-pair.

#### “MEAT” AND “BREAD” IN EXODUS 16

As we shall now see, the three appearances of the words “meat” and “bread” in Exodus 16 occur in poetic bicola embedded in the text, and the words are used in parallel positions in those bicola. None of the commentators I reviewed above recognize this fact. In contrast with the appearances of this word-pair which I have presented so far, the word-pair appears in this chapter in the order “meat/bread” instead of “bread/meat;” however, Israelite poetic convention allows parallel word-pairs to be used in either order. Kselman<sup>25</sup> identifies each of these texts as poetic fragments and analyzes their structures; the following is an expanded version of his discussion.

Verse 3a3 reads: ...*when we sat* [beshivtenu] *by the meat pot* [‘al-sir habasar] / *when we ate* [be’ochlenu] *bread to satiety* [leḥem lasova‘]... These two dependent clauses have the parallel structure AB / A'B': *when we sat* and *when we ate* are parallel uses of verbs in the same grammatical form with the

same prefix and suffix, and *by the meat pot* and *bread to satiety* are parallel phrases using the known word-pair meat/bread. In addition, the clauses have a 3:3 stress rhythm. Although as dependent clauses they could not exist independently as a poetic bicolon, the presence of parallelism and rhythm marks this text as a fragmentary poetic bicolon embedded in the text.

Verse 12a2 reads: *In the evening* [ben ha'arbayim] *you shall eat* [to'chlu] *meat* [basar] / *And in the morning* [uvaboker] *you shall be filled with* [tisbe'u-] *bread* [lahem]. These two independent clauses have the parallel structure ABC / A'B'C'. A/A' consists of the parallel word-pair *ben ha'arbayim* (a term often used for 'erev in the P document)<sup>26</sup> and *boker*, B/B' consists of the parallel between the verbs "you shall eat" [to'chlu] and "you shall be filled with" [tisbe'u]<sup>27</sup> and C/C' is a parallel between two foods meat [basar] and bread [lahem]. Furthermore, although the exact nature of the couplet's stress rhythm is open to debate, it clearly possesses such rhythm.<sup>28</sup> For these reasons, it too constitutes a poetic bicolon.

Finally, let us look at v. 8a1, in which Moses tells the people that something will happen (specifically what will happen is not stated) when the Lord gives them *in the evening* [ba'erev] *meat* [basar] *to eat* [le'echol] / *and bread* [v'lehem] *in the morning* [baboker] *to satisfy/fill (you)* [lisbo'a]... Since this text consists of a dangling dependent clause, one might question whether it should also be considered a poetic bicolon. Whatever the history of the structure of v. 8 as a whole might be, there are three reasons why I believe that v. 8a1 should be understood to have been intended as (and perhaps was, in its original form) a poetic bicolon. First, v. 8 in its entirety is structured very closely to vv. 6-7. Thus, literary characteristics that appear in vv. 6-7 might be considered to be (or to have been) present in v. 8 as well. Since Moses' and Aaron's opening words in vv. 6b-7a1 are clearly a poetic bicolon,<sup>29</sup> the author of v. 8 may well have intended Moses' opening words in this verse to be understood in the same way. Second, the parallel structure ABC / B'A'C' is apparent, with A/A' being the word-pair evening/morning, B/B' being the pair of foods "meat" and "bread," and C/C' being the parallel infinitives "to eat" and "to satisfy/fill." Furthermore, a 3:3 stress rhythm is also evident. This parallel structure and rhythm show that we are dealing with a poetic bicolon. Lastly, v. 8a1 exhibits a characteristic which also appears in the two other poetic bicola in Exodus 16 discussed above, where as we have seen the

root *s.b.* ' is associated with the bread which is eaten. The fact that this occurs in v. 8a1 is additional evidence that Moses' opening words in v. 8 originally constituted or were intended to be understood as a poetic bicolon.

The three appearances of the words "meat" and "bread" in Exodus 16 thus constitute three additional examples of their use as a parallel word-pair in biblical poetry. We must now analyze how the word-pair is used in these three texts. As to v. 3a3, Noth makes an interesting observation: "... the people saw their good life in Egypt in rather too rosy a light. For the slave labor in Egypt would hardly as a rule have eaten boiled 'flesh' by the 'flesh-pots'..."<sup>30</sup> I made a similar observation above with regard to I Kings 17:6, when I said that people in biblical times did not normally eat meat at every meal; this would be even more true, as Noth points out, of slaves. For this reason, I maintain that the words "meat" and "bread" here should not be understood literally as a "too rosy" remembrance of the people, but as another example of the traditionally-used parallel pair which figuratively indicates "food." The parallel complete phrases "sitting by the meat-pot" and "eating bread to satiety" are thus images meant to convey the idea that in Egypt the people had "*plenty* of food."

Indirect support for this position may be found in Numbers 11, which narrates another story about the people's complaining about their food in the desert. The story relates the people's longing for meat, God's anger at them for their complaining, and His sending of so many quails for them to eat that they get sick. As in Exodus 16, the people first express their longing for the food they had in Egypt (Numbers 11:5). However, it is interesting to note that their complaint doesn't confine itself to "meat" and "bread" but in fact lists all kinds of food (which by the way don't include meat *or* bread!) that they had in abundant supply in Egypt. Since these two stories share a similar theme (complaining about food and what results from that complaint), the fact that they both begin with the people remembering the food they had in Egypt may reflect a traditional element essential to the telling of stories with this theme. If so, perhaps the list of foods in Numbers 11:5 could be considered further evidence that the word-pair meat/bread in v. 3a3 is being used figuratively to mean plenty of "food" of all kinds, "food" *generally*.

In v. 12a2, the words "meat" and "bread" could, again, conceivably be understood literally. However, most of the modern commentators I reviewed

believe this verse to be part of the P document along with v. 3a3. In that case, I think it is highly unlikely that the same author would have composed two bicola (or inserted two pre-existing bicola into his composition) intending one of them to be understood figuratively and the other literally. If the author understands the word-pair in v. 3a3 figuratively, it is simplest to posit that the same author is using the same word-pair in v. 12a2 in the same figurative way. The fact that vv. 13-15 seem to presume a literal understanding of the word-pair will be addressed in the next section of this article.

Finally, as to v. 8a1, modern commentators generally agree that v. 8 as a whole is either a fragment of an alternative tradition or that it was inserted into the text as a later gloss; however, the commentators are unclear as to the reason why it was inserted. Its fragmentary state makes it difficult to give an opinion as to its original meaning and purpose. However, it is certainly possible to understand it figuratively here too. Furthermore, in light of the fact that we now have four texts in which these words appear to be used as a traditional word-pair with a meristic meaning, understanding them literally in this bicolon alone becomes more difficult. If we assume for a moment that v. 8a1 is using the meat/bread word-pair in the same figurative way as we have seen elsewhere, we will see that this understanding will allow us to answer all of the questions I raised at the beginning of this article.

#### A NEW POSSIBLE EXPLANATION OF THE “MEAT” AND THE QUAILS

If the parallel word-pair meat/bread is used all three times in Exodus 16:1-12 in what appears to be its traditional Israelite poetic sense as a figurative expression for “food,” we have a simple explanation of why the subject of “meat” is brought up in this chapter when the chapter’s overwhelming concern is the “bread”/manna: “meat” in a literal sense is in fact not brought up at all.<sup>31</sup> If this is true, though, how do we explain the coming (and immediate disappearance) of the quails in v. 13a? Indeed, how do we explain that vv. 13-15 seem intended to show how “meat” and “bread” arrived in the evening and morning, respectively, just as a *literal* understanding of vv. 8a1 and 12a2 seem to predict?

The simplest explanation would involve the fewest possible authors. Understanding the word-pairs evening/morning and meat/bread figuratively throughout the text facilitates such an explanation; the figurative understand-

ing of the first word-pair eliminates the chronological problems in the text which would support the existence of multiple authors,<sup>32</sup> and the figurative understanding of the second word-pair also eliminates the need for multiple sources (as posited by Coats and Childs) or numerous clauses and verses added by a “supplementer” (as posited by Frankel). If one author wrote Exodus 16:1-15,<sup>33</sup> and if that author intended the evening/morning and meat/bread word-pairs to be understood figuratively in their traditional Israelite poetic manner, then the only question remaining is why that author mentions the quails. I can think of two possible reasons, and both involve conforming the telling of the story to tradition. I noted previously the possible existence of an Israelite story-telling convention that both meat and bread are essential components of a complete meal. The author may have wanted to show that the Lord provided the people with such a complete meal, and therefore he briefly described the arrival of the quails since they are the “meat” that tradition says Israel ate in the desert. Alternatively, the author may have known a tradition that both manna and quails were always provided *together* in the desert; thus, he briefly mentioned the arrival of quails. However, neither of these reasons explain v. 13a’s apparent emphasis on the fact that the arrival of the quails occurred in the *evening*.

There is another possible approach. In discussing Coats’ idea that vv. 13a and 13b are a unified verse with its two halves “parallel” to one another, I pointed out that it is easy to read vv. 13b-15 as a connected narrative; indeed, this led Childs to argue that v. 13a is the end of one source, while vv. 13b-15 belong to a different source. Thus, we have seen that a discontinuity may exist in the text between vv. 13a and 13b. Several additional points in support of the idea that v. 13a doesn’t seem to fit well in the text can be marshalled.

First, v. 13a is the only part of the text which requires a literal understanding of the two word-pairs. In the story of the quails in Numbers 11:32, it seems that the quails arrive during the day. While there is no reason why quails could not actually have arrived in the evening in Exodus 16, by the same token there is no reason why they *must* have arrived at that time. On the other hand, in the Hebrew Bible the manna *always* arrives in the morning. By highlighting the evening arrival of the quails, whoever wrote v. 13a clearly intends to point out how the Lord’s promise of meat in the evening was literally fulfilled. If however we remove v. 13a, the remaining text flows smooth-

ly and is easily understood based on a figurative understanding of the word-pairs: meat/bread meaning “food” and evening/morning meaning “soon.” The people complain that they are hungry and remember the abundant food they had in Egypt; Moses promises that the Lord will appear soon to answer their complaint and will provide food soon; the Lord appears and promises in v. 12 that food will appear soon; vv. 13b-14 (perhaps beginning with *vayehi baboker*) report that the following morning there was a fall of dew around the camp, and when that evaporated, the divinely-sent food was revealed. Thus the request for and promise of “food soon” was fulfilled the very next morning.

Secondly, the appearance of the manna in v. 14a occurs upon the “rising” of the fall of the dew (*vata'al shikhvat hatal*) in the morning, a phrase which describes the dew's evaporation in the morning and therefore makes sense. In v. 13a, on the other hand, the quails are also described as “rising” (*vata'al haslav*) and covering the camp. It is difficult to understand in what sense the quails could be said to “rise;” one would expect that they would *descend*. Indeed, in Psalm 78:27 the quails are described as “raining down” from heaven, just like the manna. Individual commentators have tried without much success to justify the description of the quails as “rising.”<sup>34</sup> The explanation of the appearance of this phrase in v. 13a may be that v. 13a was added to an already-completed text, and the person who added it used the word “rising” for the coming of the quails because the word was already used in v. 14a in connection with the manna. In this way, v. 13a was anchored more firmly into the pre-existing text. The use of the word “camp” in v. 13a can be explained in the same way as a reflection of its use in v. 13b. Finally, the suspicion that v. 13a was inserted into the text is further supported by the fact that the questions I raised at the beginning of this article all focus on the swiftness with which the quails appear and immediately vanish in this half-verse. If we remove v. 13a, the quails and all the problems connected with them disappear.

For all of these reasons taken together, I propose that the simplest solution to all the questions I have raised is that the text of this chapter originally did not include v. 13a. I would suggest that v. 13a was added by a later glossator who did not understand the traditional figurative meanings of the parallel word-pairs evening/morning and meat/bread. He took these word-pairs liter-

ally, believed that the people longed for both meat and bread, saw that Moses and the Lord promised meat in the evening and bread in the morning, and then was confronted with a text that only described the manna arriving the next morning. He could not believe that the people asked for meat and were twice promised that it would arrive in the evening, but that the text never reported that it arrived. How could the Lord have promised something at a certain time and then not have fulfilled His promise? The glossator also knew there was a tradition that the Lord had supplied Israel with quails in the desert. Therefore, he added v. 13a as a brief note, in which the quails “rise” (parallel to the dew) in the evening and cover the camp (again, parallel to the dew; cf. Numbers 11:31), in order to show how the Lord keeps His promises. This solution allows us to postulate that the rest of Exodus 16:1-15 was written by one author,<sup>35</sup> with only one half-verse having been added.

This explanation agrees with Frankel’s in certain ways, while avoiding some of its pitfalls. My explanation obviates the need for a supplementer who added multiple pieces to the text, especially pieces that all introduce the longing for “meat” in three poetic bicola using the parallel word-pair meat/bread; since the bicola about “meat” and “bread” don’t literally promise “meat,” they could easily have been part of the P text. The goal of Frankel’s supplementer was to add a whole second tradition involving meat/quails, but for some unexplained reason that supplementer neglected to add that the people gathered and ate the quails, which would have given that tradition a more equal standing with the manna tradition. In my view, the glossator only added the quails to show that the Lord keeps His promises. Since he wasn’t trying to “complete” the story by adding a whole other tradition equal in weight to the manna tradition, it makes more sense that he chose to add to an already complete text the bare minimum necessary for his purpose, and felt no awkwardness about the fact that after v. 13a the quails disappear from the rest of the chapter as suddenly as they appeared. They are, after all, not really part of the story in Exodus 16.

#### CONCLUSION

In Exodus 16:1-15, the repeated use of the words “meat” and “bread” and the sudden appearance and equally sudden disappearance of the quails create a number of problems. Past commentators have not been able to satisfactorily resolve these problems because they all understood the meat/bread word-pair

literally. I have shown that “meat” and “bread” in some form are presented in many places in the Hebrew Bible as the major components of a sacrifice or of a meal honoring a guest. In addition, the word-pair “bread/meat” (or “meat/bread”) occurs as the composite phrase “bread and meat” twice in I Kings 17:6, once in Biblical poetry as a parallel pair (Isaiah 44:19), and four times in parallel bicola embedded in prose (Daniel 10:3 and Exodus 16:3, 8 and 12). In all these cases, it seems likely that these words are not being used primarily in a literal fashion but rather as a traditional fixed pair that functions as a merism indicating “food” in general. “Meat” was thus not requested by the people in Exodus 16; rather “meat/bread,” i.e. “food,” was requested and the Lord promised to provide them with it “soon,” which in fact He does. Verse 13a was added by a later glossator who didn’t understand this, who knew that the Lord had provided the people with quails in the desert, and who therefore inserted a brief note that quails arrived in the evening to show that the Lord fulfills *all* of His promises to His people. Before the addition of v. 13a, Exodus 16 was a story about the manna alone.

#### NOTES

1. All translations of biblical verses are mine, unless noted otherwise.
2. Noth, Martin, *Exodus: A Commentary*, translated by J.S. Bowden, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962 pp. 129-137.
3. Childs, Brevard S., *Exodus: A Commentary*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1974 pp. 271-292.
4. See Note 2.
5. Coats, George W., *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, Nashville: Abington Press, 1968 pp. 83-96.
6. See Coats, George W., *Exodus 1-18*, Vol. IIA of the series *The Forms of Old Testament Literature*, Rolf P. Knierim and Gene M. Tucker, eds., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999 pp. 125-136.
7. Per Coats, in Numbers 11 the tradition used by J assumed that the Lord was already providing the people with bread/manna. The meat tradition J used is one that viewed the people’s request for meat as a presumptuous demand which resulted in a punishment.
8. See Landau, Ephraim, “The Word-Pair Morning/Evening as a Parallel Word-Pair in Biblical Poetry,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 45:4, 2017 pp. 260-268, where I show that this word-pair was often used in Israelite poetry to figuratively indicate that something occurs “in a very short period of time” or “very quickly.” In Landau, Ephraim, “A Poetical Approach to ‘Evening’ and ‘Morning’ in Exodus 16:6-12,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 46:4, 2018, I show that understanding the three uses of this word-pair in Exodus 16:6-12 in this way eliminates the chronology difficulties in these verses.
9. See for example Numbers 28:4 and Esther 2:14.
10. See Note 3.



11. Frankel, David, *The Murmuring Stories of the Priestly School: A Retrieval of Ancient Sacerdotal Lore*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum Vol. LXXXIX, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2002 pp. 63-117. In contrast to the other modern commentators I have reviewed, Frankel's traditions are not based on what the Lord fed Israel in the desert.

12. According to Frankel, that tradition wasn't exactly the same as the one now found in Numbers 11, in which the quails are sent only after the manna had been coming for some time; it may be reflected in Psalm 78. See Frankel, pp. 111-113.

13. See F. Brown, S.R. Driver and C. Briggs, eds., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, reprinted from the 1906 edition, pp. 536-7. Hereafter, "BDB."

14. See Frankel, p. 114. He gives the words in Hebrew characters, and I have transliterated them here.

15. In addition to all the descriptions of authorized sacrifices in Leviticus and Numbers, see for example the Passover sacrifice in Exodus 12, and Gideon's sacrifice in Judges 6:21, both of which involve an animal and *matzot* [unleavened bread].

16. See Mitchell Dahood's discussion in Rummel, Stan, ed., *Ras Shamra Parallels: The Texts from Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible*, Vol. 3, Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1981 p. 47. By the way, he notes that the pair *bšr/lḥm* occurs in Ugaritic only as a "collocation," i.e. non-parallel words that appear in different poetic cola or in different clauses of a prose sentence.

17. As we have seen, meat was either prepared as part of a meal to honor important guests, or as part of a sacrifice (including those made in connection with an extended family feast – e.g., I Samuel 20:6).

18. See for example Genesis 14:18 and Judges 5:25.

19. See also Dahood, M. "The Chiastic Breakup in Isaiah 58:7," *Biblica* 57, 1976 p. 105, where he refers to I Kings 17:6 as an example of the use of this word-pair in this way.

20. Honeyman described the use of this type of figure of speech in the Hebrew Bible; see Honeyman, A.M., "Merismus in Biblical Hebrew," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 71:1, 1952 pp. 11-18. A merism may simply be two (or more) examples of a class, such as *tzo'n uvakar* [flocks and cattle] which is used to mean "livestock." However, it often takes the form of a "polar expression," in which two extremes are used to indicate the entire spectrum between them, such as *shamayim va'arets* [heaven and earth] which is used to mean "the entire universe."

21. Note that neither Honeyman (see Note 20) nor Krasovec mention "bread and meat" as a merism. See Krasovec, Joze, *Der Merismus im Biblisch-Hebräischen und Nordwestsemitischen* (BibOr 33), Rome, 1977.

22. The B term "on its coals" may be parallel to "in a fire" in the clause preceding this bicolon; in addition, it might be possible to argue that the actual A/A' pair is "I baked/I roasted and ate." The relationship of the preceding clause to this bicolon, and whether it is in fact a tricolon, is not relevant to the points being made here. The 3:3 rhythm assumes that the short prepositions and conjunction are unstressed; see Gray, George Buchanan, *The Forms of Hebrew Poetry*, first published in 1915, republished as part of The Library of Biblical Studies, edited by Harry M. Orlinsky, KTAV Publishing House, 1972 p. 150. Note also that Ginsberg described anacrusis (single extra-metric words) as a characteristic of Ugaritic poetry; see Ginsberg, H.L., "The Rebellion and Death of Ba'lu," *Orientalia* 5, 1936 p. 171.

23. This 4:4 rhythm assumes that *lo'* in the first colon is stressed, and that we can rely on the Masoretic *makkaphim* [hyphens] in the second colon to indicate that *lo'-va'* and *'el-pi* have one stress each. See Gray, pp. 138-143.

24. Dahood (see Note 19 above) discusses Isaiah 58:7 as a verse in which these words are used as a parallel word-pair. The poet is describing what a true “fast” should be, and Dahood translates the verse as follows: *Is it not sharing your bread [lehem] with the hungry, / and that you bring the homeless poor into your house? / When you see one naked, clothe him, / and hide [tit'alam] none of your meat [basar] for yourself.* In contrast with most translations of the final colon (e.g., *And not to ignore your own kin*, NJPS 1999), Dahood understands the word *basar* to mean literally “meat,” not “kin” as it is often used in the Hebrew Bible. Thus in his view the words “bread” in the first colon and “meat” in the fourth colon constitute a breakup of the “composite phrase” *lehem uvasar* which indicates “food.” However, Koole remarks that Dahood’s view “has not found any support;” see Koole, Jan L., *Isaiah III: Vol. 3: Chapters 56-66*, Leuven: Peeters, 2001 p. 140. It is perhaps more likely that the poet’s use of the words follows the poetic tradition of using them as a parallel word-pair, but that he uses them with a meaning other than the traditional one.

25. Kselman, John S., “The Recovery of Poetic Fragments From the Pentateuchal Priestly Source,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97:2, 1978 pp. 169-170.

26. See BDB, p. 788.

27. Kselman discusses the word-pair *'achal / sava'* [eat / be filled] at some length; he argues that *sava'* is a synonym and parallel term to *'achal*. In addition, though, I want to emphasize that in Exodus 16:3, 8 and 12 (as in the prose text Leviticus 26:5), the root *s.b. '.* is not only associated with *'achal* but is consistently associated with *lehem*. See Kselman, Note 25 above.

28. The bicolon has either a 4:3, a 3:3, a 4:2 or a 3:2 stress rhythm, depending on whether one treats the word *ben* as stressed and whether one relies on the Masoretic *makkeph* [hyphen] following *tisbe'u* as indicating only one stress on two words. See Gray’s discussion of rhythm, especially pp. 123-150. The very fact that we can identify such possible rhythms, even though we cannot decide between them, constitutes additional evidence that this is a poetic bicolon. The clause that follows, *And you shall know that I the Lord am your God*, may constitute a third line of the poetic grouping and thus v. 12a2b may in fact be a tricolon with only the first two cola exhibiting parallelism. A discussion of whether that is true is not relevant to the point being made here.

29. For my argument that vv. 6b-7a1 constitute a poetic bicolon, see Landau, Ephraim, “A Poetical Approach to ‘Evening’ and ‘Morning’ in Exodus 16:6-12,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 46:4, 2018.

30. See Noth, p. 133.

31. Indeed, neither is “bread” in the literal sense; as already discussed, the word *lehem* in this chapter may be best understood to mean “food.” See Note 13.

32. See Note 8.

33. The question of whether vv. 4-5 belong to a different source than the rest of the section, as most modern commentators contend, is not dealt with here.

34. Ibn Ezra attempts to explain this when he comments that perhaps they rose from the edge of the sea (see Numbers 11:31). Noth (p. 134) writes that they arose “from the horizon.”

35. See Note 33.