

p 51 WEEK 7: JOURNEY TO SINAI

Exodus 15:22–18:27

The Place of the Passage

After God demonstrates his great power through the plagues and finalizes Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea, these chapters record Israel's travels from the Red Sea to the foot of Mount Sinai. Throughout this section Israel is depicted as faithless and grumbling, yet God still provides for all their needs. He provides for their physical need of sustenance on multiple occasions (Ex. 15:22–17:7) as well as their spiritual need for leadership in the face of both external (17:8–16) and internal (18:1–27) problems. Ultimately, God sustains his people as he brings them to his mountain (18:5) in order to confirm his covenant relationship with them.

The Big Picture

On the journey from the Red Sea to Mount Sinai, the Israelites repeatedly reveal their lack of faith, yet God continues to show himself faithful by providing for them.

p 52 Reflection and Discussion

Read through the whole passage for this study, Exodus 15:22–18:27. Then review the shorter passages below and write your answers to the following questions. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 170–174; also available online at www.esvbible.org.)

1. God's Provision of Sustenance (15:22–17:7)

Immediately after God delivers Israel through divided water, Israel grumbles that they have no drinkable water (15:22–24). However, based on God's deliverance at the Red Sea, Israel should have responded to this seemingly dire circumstance by trusting God rather than grumbling. What does this pattern (i.e., deliverance leads to trust despite dire circumstances) look like for a Christian?

The opening verses of the manna episode (Ex. 16:1–5) contain elements of sin, grace, and law. Identify each of these elements in these verses. Of the latter two, which comes first, grace or law? Why is this significant?

Twice in Exodus 16:6–8, Moses interprets the people’s grumbling against him and Aaron as grumbling against God. What does this suggest about the nature of Moses’ leadership over Israel? How does this then inform our understanding of the people’s actions in 16:19–20?

p 53 In Exodus 16:16–26, God gives the people instructions for how to gather the manna. They are to gather just enough for each day’s consumption, and enough on the sixth day for two days’ consumption. According to Moses’ later interpretation of this in Deuteronomy 8:2–3, what were these instructions supposed to teach Israel?

At first glance, Exodus 17:1–7 seems to be about Israel grumbling for water again. However, verse 7 suggests that a deeper sin problem is the issue here. What is this problem? What are we to learn from this (see 1 Cor. 10:1–6)?

2. God’s Provision of Leadership (17:8–18:27)

Israel’s battle against Amalek contains the last appearance of the “staff of God” (17:9), which was the instrument used to bring the plagues against Egypt (e.g., 4:17, 20; 7:17; 8:5, 16; 9:23), to part the Red Sea (14:16), and to bring water from the rock (17:5). What do these prior uses of the staff suggest about the nature of the battle that ensues?

At the Red Sea, God fought Egypt *for* Israel (14:14). At Rephidim, however, God fights Amalek *through* Israel (17:8–16). What might these two types of physical p 54 warfare illustrate for us concerning God’s role and our role in the spiritual battles we face today?

The last time Jethro and Zipporah were mentioned was in chapter 4, just before Moses returned to Egypt to begin the exodus (Ex. 4:18–25). Why might the writer emphasize their presence here at the beginning of chapter 18? (Note that Moses’ “father-in-law” is mentioned eight times in the first 12 verses [Ex. 18:1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12 (2x)].)

The narratives of Exodus 15:22–17:7 portray Israel as generally faithless, despite being delivered by God from Egypt. What is ironic about the response of Jethro—who is reintroduced in 18:1 as “the priest of Midian”—to this same event (Ex. 18:8–12)? For further insight, see Matthew 3:7–9; Romans 2:28–29; Galatians 3:7.

In Exodus 18:13–22, Jethro gives Moses advice for how to assign leadership responsibilities over Israel. According to verse 23, what ultimately undergirds the success of Moses’ leadership strategy? What does this imply for leaders of God’s people today?

p 55 Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to reflect on the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for your walk with the Lord.

Gospel Glimpses

BREAD FROM HEAVEN. Not long after expressing fear over the approaching Egyptian army and experiencing God’s powerful salvation (Exodus 14), the Israelites grumble that they have no food (16:2–3). As he did previously, here again God graciously responds to their concerns and declares that he will “rain bread from heaven for you” (16:4). God provided this heavenly bread—manna—for the entirety of Israel’s wilderness wandering to sustain them throughout their travels (16:35). Similarly, when Jesus was faced with 5,000 hungry followers, he also fed them with miraculous bread (John 6:1–14). He then went on to identify himself as the living bread that has come down from heaven (v. 51). Jesus notes that though Israel was sustained by the manna in the wilderness, eventually they all died. However, those who feed upon Jesus, the living bread from heaven, will live forever (v. 58).

WATER FROM THE ROCK. Immediately after God provides this bread from heaven, the Israelites quarrel with Moses and complain that they have no water to drink. In response, God tells Moses to strike a rock, out of which water pours for the people to drink (Ex. 17:1–7). Paul sees in this episode a foreshadowing of Jesus’ work, saying that all Israel “drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ” (1 Cor. 10:4). Indeed, although the water from this rock quenched Israel’s physical thirst, it pointed to the only fount that could quench their spiritual thirst: God himself. Similarly, when passing through Samaria, Jesus told a Samaritan woman that the water from Jacob’s well would satisfy her physical thirst for a while, but that the living water he gives results in eternal life, quenching spiritual thirst forever (John 4:10, 14).

Whole-Bible Connections

SABBATH. When God instructs Israel how to gather the manna, he tells them to gather two days’ worth on the sixth day of the week so that they can honor him by resting on the seventh day (Ex. 16:22–30). Although this passage contains the first occurrence of the word “Sabbath” in Scripture (v. 23), the concept is first presented in creation when God rested on the seventh day (Gen. 2:2–3). **p 56** This divine rest in creation is later given as the grounds for Israel to rest from all their labors on the Sabbath (Ex. 20:8–11). In the New Testament, when Jesus is questioned about his actions on the seventh day, he declares that he is “lord of the Sabbath” (Matt. 12:8), and the writer of Hebrews says that those who trust in him enter God’s Sabbath rest (Heb. 4:3–4).

TESTING. In these chapters, the theme of testing appears several times. When providing both sweet water and manna, God states that he is testing Israel to see if they will obey his word (Ex. 15:25–26; 16:4). However, rather than responding faithfully to God, Israel immediately quarrels with Moses and puts God to the test (17:2, 7). Psalm 95 interprets this latter testing as stemming from Israel’s hard heart (Ps. 95:8–9), and the writer of Hebrews uses this Psalm to exhort his readers not to have an “evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God” (Heb. 3:12).

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP. Jethro advises Moses to select “men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe” to help govern the people (Ex. 18:21). These qualifications for leadership are fundamentally concerned with spiritual maturity rather than personal charisma or dynamic ability. Such spiritual requirements for leadership are later reflected in Israel’s law of the king (Deut. 17:14–20) and Paul’s instructions for elders and deacons (1 Tim. 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9). In short, in order to be a good leader of God’s people, one must first be a good follower of God himself.

Theological Soundings

PROVIDENCE. A pervading theme throughout these chapters is God’s providence. Providence simply refers to God governing his people and providing for their needs. In this section God provides his people with sweet water (Ex. 15:22–27), bread from heaven (16:1–36), and water from the rock (17:1–7). His providence is also evident in Israel’s supernatural defeat of Amalek (17:8–16) and in Jethro’s encounter with Moses, in which past provision of deliverance is recalled (18:1–12) and future provision of leadership is arranged (18:13–27). Significantly, the first three examples of God’s providence come in response to Israel’s sinful grumbling (15:24; 16:2–3; 17:3). This highlights the gracious nature of God’s providence: he does not provide for his people because they are faithful, but because *he* is faithful.

SIN. This section also emphasizes Israel’s sinfulness and rebellion. God’s people repeatedly grumble against Moses (15:24; 16:2–3; 17:3), and even twice accuse him of seeking to kill them (16:3; 17:3). In both of these latter instances, the people’s rebellion against Moses is interpreted as an affront against God himself (16:7–8; 17:2). Furthermore, Israel’s disobedience to God’s commands through Moses is mentioned twice in the account of the manna (16:20, 27–29), [p 57](#) and their general lack of faith after the Red Sea deliverance stands in sharp contrast to Jethro’s praise of God’s supreme power based on the same event (18:9–12). These various elements combine to portray Israel as wholly sinful and unworthy recipients of God’s favor.

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Exodus 15:22–18:27 for your own life today. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

[p 58](#) 4. Exodus 15:22–18:27

As You Finish This Unit ...

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Exodus. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on some key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight and underline these things to review again in the future.