

EXODUS 16–18 — Provision, the Rock, the Battle & Shared Leadership

Concise Teaching Guide — Chuck Smith

Big Idea: God is not merely taking Israel *out of Egypt*. He is teaching them how to **live in dependence upon Him**. Hunger, thirst, warfare, and even leadership pressure become classrooms in which Israel learns that God provides, God sustains, God fights, and God gives wisdom for the journey.

EXODUS 16 — BREAD FROM HEAVEN

1. Israel Murmurs Again — Exodus 16:1–3

Only about **45 days after leaving Egypt**, Israel becomes hungry and begins complaining against Moses and Aaron. They romanticize Egypt:

“When we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full...” — **Exodus 16:3**

Smith emphasizes how quickly they forgot the **bondage, suffering, pain, and slavery** and remembered only the food.

Teaching Point

This becomes a picture of the believer looking backward at the old life.

Once delivered from bondage, we can strangely remember the pleasures of sin while forgetting its chains.

Egypt begins to look better when the wilderness gets difficult.

2. Complaining Against God's Servants Can Become Complaining Against God – Exodus 16:4–12

God promises:

“I will rain bread from heaven for you...” – **Exodus 16:4**

But the provision is also a **test of obedience**. They must gather only what God commands.

Moses tells Israel:

“Your murmurings are not against us, but against the LORD.” – **Exodus 16:8**

Smith applies this personally: when God has led us into a circumstance, complaining about where He has placed us can ultimately become complaining against the One who led us there.

3. Manna – Daily Dependence Upon God – Exodus 16:13–21

God provides quail in the evening and manna in the morning.

The Israelites ask:

“What is it?”

Smith notes that **manna essentially means “What is it?”**

Each family gathers what it needs for that day.

They are specifically told **not to store it overnight**. Those who disobey discover that it breeds worms and stinks.

Spiritual Principle

God is teaching Israel:

Trust Me today.

Not last week's provision.

Not tomorrow's provision.

Today's provision.

This anticipates Jesus' prayer:

"Give us this day our daily bread." — **Matthew 6:11**

4. The Sabbath Before Sinai — Exodus 16:22–30

On the sixth day, Israel gathers twice as much manna because none will appear on the seventh.

Smith highlights something easy to miss:

The Sabbath is being practiced before the Ten Commandments.

The formal command:

"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy." — **Exodus 20:8**

has not yet been given.

Yet the **six-days-and-one-day-rest pattern is already operating** in Israel's national life.

Smith stresses that Sabbath was fundamentally a **gift of rest**, connecting naturally with Jesus' later statement:

"The sabbath was made for man..." — **Mark 2:27**

God designed human beings with a need for rest.

5. The Memorial Jar of Manna — Exodus 16:31–36

Manna was:

- white,
- like coriander seed,
- and tasted like wafers made with honey.

God commands Moses to preserve an omer of manna as a memorial so future generations can see how God fed Israel.

Smith connects this preserved manna with the later contents associated with the Ark of the Covenant.

Compare:

“The golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded...” — **Hebrews 9:4**

Israel would eat manna for **40 years**.

EXODUS 17 — WATER FROM THE ROCK & WAR WITH AMALEK

6. “Is the LORD Among Us, or Not?” — Exodus 17:1–7

Israel reaches Rephidim.

There is **no water**.

Once again they accuse Moses:

“Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?” — **Exodus 17:3**

Moses cries to God, fearing the people may stone him.

Smith makes an interesting distinction: **their thirst was legitimate; their accusations were not.**

Food and water are natural human needs. The problem wasn't having the need—it was responding to the need by questioning God's presence and faithfulness.

The place becomes:

Massah — testing/temptation

Meribah — contention/strife

because Israel asked:

“Is the LORD among us, or not?” — **Exodus 17:7**

THE ROCK IS CHRIST

This becomes the theological centerpiece of Smith's treatment of these chapters.

God tells Moses:

“Thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it...” — **Exodus 17:6**

Paul later interprets the imagery:

“That Rock was Christ.” — **1 Corinthians 10:4**

Smith stresses that this does **not** make Exodus mythology. The event is historical, but God also built spiritual meaning into the event.

The Picture

Rock → Christ

Rock smitten → Christ crucified

Water flowing → Life through Christ

And this leads directly into Jesus' declaration at the Feast of Tabernacles.

JESUS & THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

Smith explains the Jewish ceremony commemorating God's wilderness provision.

During the feast, priests carried water from the **Pool of Siloam** and poured it out at the Temple as Israel remembered God's provision of water from the rock.

Then Jesus stands before the people and declares:

“If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.” — **John 7:37**

And:

“Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” — **John 7:38**

Smith sees Jesus effectively identifying Himself with the wilderness Rock:

The water Israel remembered had its ultimate fulfillment in Christ—the source of living water.

Compare also:

“Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” — **Revelation 22:17**

WHY MOSES COULD NOT STRIKE THE ROCK TWICE

Smith then jumps ahead to **Numbers 20:7–12**.

Years later Israel again needs water.

This time God tells Moses:

Speak to the rock.

But angry Moses strikes it.

God still gives water—but Moses is disciplined.

Smith sees a deeper typological reason:

Christ only needed to be smitten once.

“Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many...” — **Hebrews 9:28**

“By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” — **Hebrews 10:14**

The first rock was **struck**.

The second time Moses was supposed to **speak**.

Smith's picture is:

Christ has already been smitten.

We do not crucify Him again.

Now we simply come to Him and ask.

7. AMALEK — THE WAR WITH THE FLESH — Exodus 17:8–16

Immediately after the water comes:

“Then came Amalek...”

Smith sees the sequence as spiritually significant.

Amalek descended from **Esau** and becomes, in Smith's teaching, a biblical picture or type of **the flesh**.

Paul describes the same internal conflict:

“The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh...” — **Galatians 5:17**

Smith's application:

One of the greatest barriers to experiencing the fullness of God's promises is our own flesh.

8. Moses, Joshua, Aaron & Hur – Exodus 17:9–13

Joshua fights Amalek below.

Moses stands above with the rod of God.

When Moses' hands are raised:

Israel prevails.

When his hands fall:

Amalek prevails.

Eventually Aaron and Hur hold Moses' hands up until victory comes.

There is a beautiful picture here:

Joshua fights.

Moses intercedes.

Aaron and Hur support.

God gives victory.

Smith also points out that **Joshua/Yeshua and Jesus share the underlying name meaning—“Yahweh/Jehovah is salvation.”**

9. Jehovah-Nissi – Exodus 17:15

After the victory Moses builds an altar:

“And called the name of it Jehovah-nissi.”

Jehovah-Nissi

“The LORD is my banner.”

Israel's victory was not ultimately found in Joshua's sword.

Their banner was **the LORD Himself**.

AMALEK, SAUL & HAMAN

Smith follows the Amalek theme much farther through Scripture.

God later commands Saul to destroy Amalek:

1 Samuel 15

Saul refuses complete obedience and preserves King Agag and the best livestock.

Samuel responds:

“To obey is better than sacrifice.” — 1 Samuel 15:22

Smith's spiritual application is severe but memorable:

You cannot negotiate peace with the flesh.

Paul similarly says:

“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth...” — Colossians 3:5

and:

“I am crucified with Christ...” — Galatians 2:20

Smith then connects the unfinished Amalek story with **Haman in Esther**, whom Esther identifies as “the Agagite” (Esther 3:1), linking him in the biblical narrative with Agag. Smith's lesson is that what Saul failed to destroy eventually threatened to destroy Israel.

Teaching Principle

The flesh isn't reformed.

It is crucified.

EXODUS 18 — JETHRO & THE WISDOM OF DELEGATION

10. Moses' Family Returns — Exodus 18:1–12

Jethro hears what God has done for Israel and brings Moses' wife **Zipporah** and his sons back to him.

Smith recalls the difficult circumcision episode from:

Exodus 4:24–26

and suggests Moses apparently sent Zipporah and the boys back to her family during his confrontation with Pharaoh.

Moses recounts God's deliverance.

Jethro responds:

“Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods.” — **Exodus 18:11**

He offers sacrifices, and Aaron and Israel's elders fellowship with him before God.

Smith points out that Jethro provides another example of someone **outside Israel who nevertheless knew and worshiped God**.

11. Moses Is Doing EVERYTHING — Exodus

18:13–18

The next day Jethro watches Moses work.

People line up **from morning until evening** waiting for Moses personally to settle their disputes.

Jethro essentially says:

Moses, this is going to kill you.

“The thing that thou doest is not good.”

“Thou wilt surely wear away...” — **Exodus 18:17–18**

Moses has become the bottleneck.

Not because he's a bad leader—

but because **everything depends upon him.**

12. Leadership Requires Delegation — Exodus 18:19–26

Jethro recommends a structure:

Moses

↓

Leaders of **thousands**

↓

Leaders of **hundreds**

↓

Leaders of **fifties**

↓

Leaders of **tens**

Routine matters are handled below.

Only difficult cases reach Moses.

Smith compares Moses' role to a kind of **"Supreme Court."**

Leadership Principle

A leader should not ask:

"Can I do this?"

but sometimes:

"Am I the person who should be doing this?"

Smith warns about **"majoring in the minors"**—spending so much energy on lesser tasks that we have nothing left for what God actually called us to do.

THE NEW TESTAMENT PARALLEL — ACTS

6

Smith directly connects Exodus 18 with:

Acts 6:1–7

The early church faces a dispute over the distribution of food to widows.

Rather than abandon their primary calling, the apostles appoint qualified people to oversee the ministry:

"We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." — Acts 6:4

Smith's point:

Delegation isn't abandoning ministry.

Delegation protects the ministry God actually called you to perform.

Different members of Christ's body have different gifts, and a healthy church allows those gifts to function rather than requiring one person to do everything.

13. THREE QUALIFICATIONS FOR GODLY LEADERS — Exodus 18:21

Jethro tells Moses to choose:

1. Men who fear God

They possess genuine reverence for God and understand that they are accountable to Him.

2. Men of truth

Integrity matters.

3. Men who hate covetousness

They are not motivated by personal gain.

Smith especially emphasizes the **fear of God** because spiritual teachers will ultimately answer to God for what they teach.

He connects this with:

“My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.” — **James 3:1**

Smith therefore describes his own principle for teaching Scripture:

Where Scripture speaks, speak.

Where Scripture is silent, be careful not to pretend that it speaks.

WHAT MOST PEOPLE MISS

1. The wilderness isn't merely punishment—it is training.

Israel's repeated needs create repeated opportunities to discover:

God is enough.

Hunger → God provides manna.

Thirst → God provides water.

Enemy → God provides victory.

Overwhelming responsibility → God provides people.

2. Manna teaches dependence before Israel receives the Law.

God is already training Israel to obey **daily instructions** before Sinai.

Their relationship with God isn't supposed to begin with rules.

It begins with **trust**.

3. Sabbath appears before the Ten Commandments.

The manna account shows Israel observing the seventh-day rest before Exodus 20 formally gives the Sabbath command.

4. The Rock becomes an explicit New Testament picture of Christ.

This isn't merely a Christian imagination imposed on Exodus.

Paul explicitly writes:

“That Rock was Christ.” — **1 Corinthians 10:4**

Smith then connects:

Exodus 17 → Numbers 20 → John 7 → 1 Corinthians 10

into one remarkable biblical thread.

5. The timing of Amalek is interesting.

First:

Water comes from the Rock.

Then:

Amalek attacks.

Smith sees a spiritual picture:

Christ gives life → then comes conflict with the flesh.

Salvation doesn't mean the end of spiritual conflict.

In many ways, it marks the beginning of it.

6. Israel wins in two places simultaneously.

Joshua is fighting **in the valley**.

Moses is interceding **on the mountain**.

The visible battle below is affected by what is happening above.

And even the intercessor needs Aaron and Hur.

Nobody in the story wins alone.

7. “Jehovah-Nissi” isn't merely a victory slogan.

The Hebrew image is a **banner or standard** around which an army gathers.

Israel isn't simply saying:

"God gave us victory."

They are declaring:

"God Himself is the banner under which we fight."

8. Exodus 18 gives us an extraordinarily early leadership model.

Jethro's solution contains principles that still work:

Teach clearly.

Establish standards.

Choose people of character.

Delegate authority.

Escalate difficult problems.

Protect the leader's essential responsibilities.

And Acts 6 shows essentially the same principle operating in the early Church.

THE BIG PICTURE — EXODUS 16–18

These three chapters form a beautiful progression:

Exodus 16 — God provides BREAD.

Exodus 17:1–7 — God provides WATER.

Exodus 17:8–16 — God provides VICTORY.

Exodus 18 — God provides PEOPLE.

And behind all four stands the same lesson:

God does not simply deliver His people and then leave them to figure out the journey alone.

He feeds them.

He gives them drink.

He fights for them.

He teaches them.

He surrounds them with others.

And He patiently transforms a nation of former slaves into a people capable of walking with Him.

Egypt taught Israel how to be slaves.

The wilderness is teaching Israel how to become God's people.