

In Their Midst

Exodus: From Slavery to Covenant Presence

Session 7. Bread in the Wilderness

Reading: Exodus 15:22-18:27

Part One

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

The group discovers how thirst, hunger, conflict, and shared leadership reveal both Israel's distrust and God's patient provision.

Catholic Touchstone

This session touches trust in divine providence, the Eucharistic typology of manna, perseverance in prayer, and the shared service of ordered ministry.

Israel has crossed the sea, but freedom immediately brings new questions. Can the people trust God when water is bitter, food is scarce, enemies attack, and Moses is overwhelmed? Watch how God provides without pretending that distrust is harmless. He gives water, bread, victory, and wise counsel while training a rescued people to depend on him day by day.

What You Need to Know

Four crises, several kinds of provision

The passage moves through thirst at Marah, hunger in the wilderness of Sin, thirst at Rephidim, attack by Amalek, and Moses' unsustainable workload. God's provision is not identical in every scene. Sometimes he acts miraculously, sometimes he gives instructions, sometimes he works through human courage and prayer, and sometimes he supplies wisdom through Jethro.

Testing goes in both directions

God tests Israel by giving commands that expose whether the people will trust him. At Massah, Israel tests God by demanding proof of his presence on its own terms. Scripture therefore distinguishes God's formative testing from the creature's attempt to put God on trial.

Manna trains daily dependence

The manna is both gift and discipline. Israel receives enough for each day, cannot secure the future by hoarding, and must gather differently before the Sabbath. The double portion does not establish that Israel earned provision. It shows that God's command and God's gift belong together.

Do not reduce the Amalek scene to technique

Joshua fights while Moses holds up the staff of God with raised hands, and Aaron and Hur support him when his strength fails. Exodus does not itself call the raised hands prayer or intercession; that is the traditional Christian reading, and it is worth naming as a reading rather than as the narrative's own wording. The text does not present raised hands as a magical mechanism. It holds together divine help, persevering prayer, embodied weakness, communal support, and responsible human action.

Jethro's counsel is not a rejection of Moses

Jethro recognizes that Moses' solitary approach is unsustainable. Moses remains responsible to teach God's ways and handle the hardest matters, but trustworthy men share the ordinary burden. Delegation here is not abandonment. It is ordered service for the good of both leader and people.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Manna and the true bread from heaven

Later Scripture remembers manna as bread from heaven and as a sign of God's fatherly care. Jesus takes up this history and identifies himself as the true bread from heaven, giving his flesh for the life of the world. The Church therefore reads manna as a genuine figure of the Eucharist, while recognizing that Exodus first describes God's real provision of food for hungry Israel.

Water from the rock

At Rephidim, water comes from the struck rock despite Israel's accusation and testing. St. Paul reads Israel's wilderness food and drink typologically and identifies the spiritual rock with Christ. The fulfillment is greater than the figure. Christ does not merely give life from outside himself, but becomes the source of supernatural life for his people.

Shared service among God's people

Jethro's counsel establishes a pattern in which responsibility is shared without dissolving order. This is not a direct prediction of Holy Orders, but it prepares readers to recognize that God commonly serves his people through differentiated offices, tested character, and burdens carried together.

Voices of the Church

Read these aloud where they land. Each is either a direct citation or an honest summary, labelled as such.

St. John Chrysostom, c. 347-407

St. John Chrysostom reads Israel's passage through the sea, manna, and water as sacramental figures. He also stresses that receiving great gifts did not make Israel's later unfaithfulness harmless.

Homilies on First Corinthians 23.1-3.

How this is cited. This is a summary of Chrysostom's exposition of 1 Corinthians 10:1-5. Section numbering varies slightly among editions, but the teaching is explicit in Homily 23.

For the group. Invite the group to receive God's gifts with gratitude and continuing fidelity, not presumption.

St. Cyprian of Carthage, d. 258

St. Cyprian teaches that the petition for daily bread includes ordinary provision and, for Christians, Christ the bread of life received in the Eucharist.

On the Lord's Prayer 18.

How this is cited. This is an honest summary of Cyprian's explanation of the petition, with his Eucharistic application preserved rather than turned into a direct quotation.

For the group. Daily dependence on God embraces both bodily need and the deeper hunger only Christ can satisfy.

St. Benedict of Nursia, c. 480-547

St. Benedict teaches that a superior should combine firmness with mercy, hate faults while loving the brothers, and arrange everything with prudent moderation so that the strong have something to strive for and the weak are not driven away.

Rule of St. Benedict 64.7-19.

How this is cited. This is a close summary of the Rule's instructions concerning the abbot, especially its language about prudent moderation and care for both strong and weak.

For the group. Leadership serves people best when authority, compassion, realistic limits, and shared responsibility remain together.

Catechism Connection

The Catechism says

CCC 1094. The Church reads the Old Testament in light of Christ, recognizing persons, events, and signs that prefigure what God accomplishes in the new covenant.

CCC 1334-1335. Manna prefigures the Eucharist, and the multiplication of the loaves prefigures its superabundance.

CCC 2119. Tempting God means putting his goodness and power to the test by demanding that he prove himself on our terms.

CCC 2837. The petition for daily bread entrusts both our earthly needs and our hunger for the Word of God and the Eucharist to the Father.

CCC 874-876. Christ is the source of ministry in the Church, and the offices he instituted are ordered to the service and growth of his people.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch

Why God brings Israel out (develop). Ask what the daily instructions, Sabbath rhythm, worship, and ordered community suggest about the kind of people God is forming. Do not open the sealed guesses yet.

Deliverance through water (develop). Contrast the sea as passage out of slavery with the wilderness waters that sustain a people learning to live in freedom.

Fear of God versus fear of rulers (develop). Notice Jethro's requirement that those who share judgment must fear God, be trustworthy, and reject dishonest gain.

God dwelling among his people (develop). Attend to Israel's question at Massah, whether the Lord is among them. Let the question remain open as the study moves toward Sinai and the sanctuary.

Mediators of deliverance (develop). Moses intercedes, Joshua fights, Aaron and Hur support, and appointed judges carry responsibility. God provides through a community of distinct servants.

Where is the lamb? (hold). Do not force the Passover thread into this session. Let manna and water establish their own patterns of provision.

The sealed guess (hold). Participants may notice new evidence about God's purpose, but their written guesses remain sealed until Session 8.

Objection Bench

Leader only. Do not raise these unless someone in the room does.

If God had truly delivered Israel, the people should not have faced hunger, thirst, enemies, or exhausted leadership.

Exodus does not equate deliverance with the immediate removal of every hardship. God has genuinely freed Israel from Pharaoh, yet he now forms the people through situations in which trust, obedience, courage, prayer, and communal responsibility must grow.

Reading manna as Eucharistic symbolism ignores its plain meaning as physical food.

Catholic interpretation preserves the literal sense. Manna really feeds hungry Israel. The typological sense arises because later inspired texts take up this event and relate wilderness food to Christ and the sacramental life of his people.

Session Goals

1. Trace the recurring movement from crisis and complaint to God's provision and instruction.
2. Distinguish honest need from distrustful accusation and from putting God to the test.
3. Discover how the New Testament reads manna and water from the rock in relation to Christ.
4. Identify how prayer, action, support, character, and delegation work together in the final two scenes.
5. Help participants name one area where they can practice daily trust rather than anxious control.

Time Note

Planned for 75-90 Minutes

Allow 8 minutes for prayer and welcome, 10 minutes for Win questions, 10 minutes for the selected reading, 45 to 50 minutes for Build, and 12 minutes for Send, weekly practices, memory verse, and closing prayer.

If you are running long, cut in this order.

1. Omit the Dig Deeper prompt after Question 8.
2. Combine Questions 3 and 4 into one discussion about manna, obedience, and daily dependence.
3. Take one response to each Send question rather than moving around the whole group.

Part Two

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Pray together

Father, you gave your people food when they were hungry, water when they were thirsty, help when they were attacked, and wisdom when their burdens became too heavy. Send your Holy Spirit to open the Scriptures to us. Show us where we distrust you, and teach us to receive your gifts with gratitude and obedience. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

Open questions. No wrong answers. Let everyone speak before you move on.

W1. When has someone helped you in a practical way at exactly the right time?

W2. Which is harder for you, asking for help, receiving help, or sharing responsibility with someone else?

Keep this warm and concrete. Do not turn the opening into a test of whether participants trust God enough.

Read

Read aloud

Use four readers. Read Exodus 15:22-27; 16:1-18, 31-36; 17:1-16; and 18:13-27. Before beginning, explain that the omitted verses contain further manna instructions, Israel's Sabbath violations, and Jethro's arrival and confession. Encourage everyone to keep the full passage open.

Build

Numbered inductive questions. Ask, wait, let the group work the text. The ANSWER boxes are for you to share after the discussion, not before it.

Need, distrust, and provision

1. Scan Exodus 15:22 through 18:27. What crises arise, how do the people or leaders respond, and what does God provide in each case?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The crises include bitter water, hunger, renewed thirst, Amalek's attack, and Moses' overwhelming workload. Israel repeatedly murmurs or questions God's care. Moses cries out, follows God's commands, intercedes, and eventually receives counsel. God provides drinkable water, manna and quail, water from the rock, victory through prayer and battle, and a structure of shared leadership.

2. In Exodus 15:22-27, what does Israel's response to bitter water reveal, and what does God's response reveal?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The people's first response is complaint against Moses rather than confidence after the sea. God responds to Moses' cry by showing him what to do, making the water drinkable, giving instruction, and leading Israel to abundant water at Elim. The scene exposes fragile trust while revealing patient provision and a desire to teach obedience.

Dig Deeper

Compare the people's question in Exodus 15:24 with their earlier fear at the sea. What has changed externally, and what still needs to change within them?

Bread for each day

3. What specific instructions accompany the manna in Exodus 16, and what habits do those instructions seem designed to form?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. List the instructions attached to the manna.

Ground. Ask what habit each instruction is training.

Depth. Consider why God forms a people through a daily limit rather than through a stockpile.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The people gather a daily portion, gather according to need, avoid ordinary hoarding, collect a double portion before the Sabbath, and rest on the seventh day. These commands train daily reliance, equality of provision, obedience, and a rhythm in which work yields to holy rest.

4. Where do you see distrust or disobedience in Exodus 16, and where do you see God's patience?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The people romanticize Egypt, accuse Moses and Aaron of bringing them out to die, keep manna overnight against God's command, and go out to gather on the Sabbath. God hears their murmuring, provides food, repeats his instructions, preserves the Sabbath portion, and commands that manna be kept as a memorial for future generations.

Water and testing

5. In Exodus 17:1-7, what exactly are the people asking, accusing, and testing? How does Moses respond, and how does God respond?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The need for water is real, but the people quarrel with Moses, accuse him of bringing them out to kill them, and ask whether the Lord is among them. Moses recognizes that their demand is placing God on trial and cries out to him. God tells Moses to go with Israel's elders, strike the rock with the staff used at the Nile, and provide water. God answers their need without approving their distrust.

Live discovery: the wilderness read in Christ

Live discovery

Divide into two groups. One group reads 1 Corinthians 10:1-5. The other reads John 6:30-35 and 48-58. Give them four minutes to mark every reference to bread, food, drink, heaven, life, or Christ, then report what they find.

Let them find it. 1 Corinthians 10:1-5; John 6:30-35; John 6:48-58

6. How do later inspired writers interpret Israel's wilderness food and drink? Find repeated words, contrasts, and identifications.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

St. Paul calls the wilderness gifts spiritual food and spiritual drink and identifies the rock with Christ, while warning that privilege did not guarantee faithfulness. In John, the crowd invokes manna, but Jesus distinguishes the former gift from the true bread given by the Father. He identifies himself as the bread of life and speaks of giving his flesh for the life of the world. The New Testament therefore treats the wilderness gifts as real events that also point beyond themselves to Christ.

7. Build the strongest case for reading manna only as a picture of general spiritual dependence, then press that reading against the details of the texts you just found. What can we responsibly conclude?

Build then press

The strongest form of the objection. Exodus describes physical food, not the Eucharist. Jesus first explains eating and drinking through coming to him and believing in him, and at the close of the discourse he says plainly that it is the spirit that gives life and the flesh is of no avail, and that the words he has spoken are spirit and life. St. Paul uses Israel as a moral warning and does not teach that manna itself became Christ's body. On this reading a Eucharistic interpretation imports later Catholic doctrine into a text whose point is dependence on God received by faith.

Answering from the text. The Catholic reading agrees that manna remains physical food and that faith is essential. It does not claim that manna was already the Eucharist or that Exodus alone proves the Real Presence. Take John 6:63 head on rather than around it. In John, flesh set against spirit ordinarily means human capacity left to itself, not the flesh of Christ, which he has just called true food; and the verse comes after he has refused to soften his language for those leaving him, which is a strange way to correct a misunderstanding he had caused. His words are spirit and life precisely because the gift he promises is given by the Spirit and received in faith, which is what the Church holds of the Eucharist. Then let the development do its work: Jesus moves from belief and bread from heaven to giving his flesh for the world's life, calls his flesh true food and his blood true drink, and ties eating and drinking to abiding in him and to resurrection. St. Paul expressly calls the wilderness gifts spiritual and identifies the rock with Christ. Read together, these texts support manna as a divinely intended figure whose fulfillment is Christ and, in the Church's reading, his Eucharistic gift.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

A responsible conclusion preserves both senses. Manna literally fed Israel and trained daily trust. Within the unity of Scripture, it also prefigures the greater bread from heaven. The Eucharistic conclusion does not rest on a loose resemblance or on Exodus by itself, but on Christ's words, the apostolic reading of Israel's wilderness, and the Church's received interpretation.

Prayer, action, and support

8. In the battle with Amalek, what part is played by Joshua, Moses, Aaron, Hur, and God? What would be lost if we emphasized only one of them?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. Name what each person does in the battle.

Ground. Ask what would be missing if any one of them stopped.

Depth. Discuss how the victory can be genuinely God's while running through many hands.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Joshua selects men and fights. Moses stands with the staff of God and perseveres with raised hands, which tradition reads as persevering prayer. Aaron and Hur support Moses when he cannot continue alone. God gives Israel victory. Focusing only on battle could make success seem self-produced. Focusing only on prayer could ignore Joshua's obedient action. Ignoring Aaron and Hur would overlook the communal support needed for perseverance.

Dig Deeper

Where do you currently need to act, where do you need to pray, and where do you need someone to help hold up your hands?

A burden shared

9. What problem does Jethro identify in Exodus 18:13-27, and what parts of Moses' calling remain his responsibility after he delegates?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Jethro sees Moses spending the entire day judging every dispute while the people wait and both leader and people wear themselves out. Moses must still represent the people before God, bring their cases to God, teach the statutes and laws, and show them the way to live. Capable judges handle ordinary cases, while difficult matters still come to Moses.

10. According to Exodus 18:21, what qualities should mark those who receive authority? Why might each quality matter?

Take it as far as the room wants

Floor. List the qualities Jethro names.

Ground. Ask what failure each quality guards against.

Depth. Consider why shared authority requires character and not only competence.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

They are to be capable, God-fearing, trustworthy, and opposed to dishonest gain. Ability protects the people from incompetence. Fear of God places judgment under divine authority. Trustworthiness guards truth and consistency. Refusal of dishonest gain protects justice from bribery and self-interest.

What kind of people are being formed?

11. Without opening your sealed guess, what evidence does this whole passage add about what God is forming Israel to become after slavery?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God is forming a people who depend on him daily, obey his word, keep holy rhythms, remember his gifts, face enemies with prayer and action, judge justly, share responsibility, and recognize that the Lord is among them. Exodus is moving beyond escape from Pharaoh toward a covenant community ordered around God's presence and instruction.

Send

Open questions. Let these land in silence if they need to.

S1. Where are you most tempted to treat a real need as evidence that God has abandoned you?

S2. What burden are you carrying alone that may need prayer, practical action, or trustworthy help?

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Pray the Our Father slowly on three mornings. Pause at the petition for daily bread and name one bodily need, one spiritual need, and one person whose needs you will place before the Father.
2. Choose one recurring complaint. Each time it arises this week, state the need honestly to God, thank him for one provision already received, and take one obedient next step.
3. Practice shared responsibility. Ask for concrete help with one burden, or offer specific help to someone whose hands are growing tired.
4. If you are properly disposed, attend Mass this week with special attention to Christ the bread of life. Arrive five minutes early and ask for the grace to receive his gifts with faithful obedience.

Scripture Memory

Exodus 16:4

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not.'"

Exodus 16:4

Closing Prayer

Pray together

Lord Jesus Christ, true bread from heaven and source of living water, forgive us when fear turns our needs into accusations. Teach us to ask, receive, obey, and give thanks. Strengthen those who are weary, make us willing to support one another, and keep us faithful in the freedom you have given us. Amen.

Part Three

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order. Print this page and keep it in front of you.

Primary text

- **Exodus 15:22-18:27** Full session range
- **Exodus 15:22-27** Bitter water and Elim
- **Exodus 16:1-36** Manna, quail, Sabbath, and memorial
- **Exodus 17:1-7** Water from the rock and testing at Massah
- **Exodus 17:8-16** Amalek, Joshua, and supported intercession
- **Exodus 18:1-27** Jethro and shared judgment

Old Testament reflection

- **Psalms 78:19-25** Israel's later remembrance of bread from heaven
- **Wisdom 16:20-26** Manna, divine care, and dependence on God's word

New Testament fulfillment

- **1 Corinthians 10:1-5** Spiritual food, spiritual drink, and the rock identified with Christ
- **John 6:30-35; 6:60-69** The Father gives the true bread from heaven, and the hard saying with 6:63.
- **John 6:48-58; 6:60-69** Christ gives his flesh for the life of the world, and the hard saying with 6:63.
- **Acts 6:1-7** Ordered service and the sharing of responsibilities

Terms

- **manna.** The name given to the wilderness food, connected in the narrative with Israel's question, 'What is it?'
- **Massah.** Testing
- **Meribah.** Quarreling or contention

Catechism

- CCC 1094. Old Testament events can prefigure Christ and the new covenant.
- CCC 1334-1335. Manna prefigures the Eucharist, and the multiplication of the loaves prefigures its superabundance.
- CCC 2119. We must not demand that God prove himself on our terms.
- CCC 2837. Daily bread includes earthly needs, God's Word, and the Eucharist.
- CCC 874-876. Christ is the source of ministry in the Church, and the offices he instituted are ordered to the service and growth of his people.