

## Life Between Now and Eternity

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Zach Carter

Exodus: Redeemer and Redeemed / Ex 15:22–27

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### Sermon Questions – Group Leaders, consider breaking off into men’s and women’s subgroups for this week.

1. Trials reveal what is already inside our hearts. Can you think of a recent trial that exposed an area in your life that needed attention? How did you respond, and what did you learn from it?
  2. The sermon uses the metaphor of unexploded ordinance in our hearts. Confess any "unexploded ordinances" in your life—hidden issues that could cause harm if not addressed? How can you start addressing these issues with God's help?
  3. Grumbling can be contagious and harmful to any group but especially a church. How can you cultivate a more grateful and edifying attitude in your interactions with others at church or your workplace? What can you do to help others avoid the trap of grumbling?
  4. “Wilderness” is a place of both challenge and opportunity. How can you shift your perspective to see your current challenges as opportunities for growth and reliance on God? Discuss practical ways to embrace God’s grace during difficult times.
  5. God provided water at Marah and led the Israelites to the oasis at Elim. Testify one or two ways you have experienced God’s provision in your life after a challenging season. Share any specific instances where you saw God’s faithfulness in meeting your needs.
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### Sermon Notes

#### Textual Idea

Moses tells us here about how God will expose his people’s needs and then causing them to rely upon him.

#### Sermon Idea

It’s the exact same for Christians: God makes us holy by exposing our needs and causing us to rely upon him.

#### Interrogative

The question for us is: are we willing to have God excavate our lives to show us our needs? Are we going to resist his grace to make us holy?

#### 1) You will journey through wilderness.

##### Exodus 15:22–23 ESV

<sup>22</sup> Then Moses made Israel set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. <sup>23</sup> When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah.

Sur is the wasteland just east of the modern Suez Canal. Even today it is so desolate that the little yellow man on Google Maps can’t be dropped anywhere in the area.

- › Have you ever met a discouraging season to only find it punctuated by insult added to injury? We're about to learn why this happened to Israel in just a moment, and I think it will illuminate for you why God sometimes has you walk through similar circumstances.

**Wilderness** is an important context in the Bible. Critically, the space is non-inhabited, non-claimed places people go to get away from people. Hagar flees the wrath of Sarah in the wilderness. Or in a more negative example, bandits flee into the wilderness so they cannot be found. In the New Testament, Jesus flees to the wilderness to be alone with the Father.

What is critical in both of these meanings—both the negative and positive examples—is the isolation of the wilderness. In the Bible, a season of being in the wilderness itself is neither good nor bad. Instead, its better to think of the wilderness as an opportunity. How will you use the wilderness moments of your life where you are isolated: to seek the Lord? Or flee?

Of course, **Three days** is significant too. Its a literary expression found throughout the Bible: it usually describes a period of time of preparation either for change or purification. Jonah spends three days in the whale in preparation to change his obedience. Jesus spends three days in the grave in preparation for his exhalation, both a change and purification.

There's a moment in 1 Corinthians 10 where Paul explicitly ties the experience of the Israelites in the wilderness to the Christian experience, and its a verse I'm sure almost all of you have some idea of. 1 Corinthians 10:13 "13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability."

Right at the beginning of that pericope, Paul has written to the Corinthians that the **wandering journey of the Israelites is an example of what the Christian life** is about and we should learn from them.

#### **1 Corinthians 10:6 ESV**

<sup>6</sup> Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.

Paul makes something clear about the Christian life: the temptation to give into our weaknesses is ever present.

In 1 Corinthians 10, he connects idolatry, holiness, and wilderness: his logic is comparable to the warning of the unexploded ordinance in Germany. Each an every one of us can destroy our lives in a moment if we allow the things we crave to take us over.

#### **1 Corinthians 10:11–12 ESV**

<sup>11</sup> Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. <sup>12</sup> Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

We know from our own experience that we walk through moments of perceived isolation where we have opportunities to flee God towards idols—those left over patters

#### **So what's the point of this wilderness journey?**

God takes the Israelites the long way through the wilderness because he is preparing them to move into the land. Here's what I mean:

**The people have left Egypt but Egypt has not left the people.** So, God is going to us take the people through the wilderness—remember, a neutral place in the Bible—to refine and purify them. It is an opportunity for them to be faithful or not.

We know how this ends for them: this generation does not see the promised land. But they do not know that yet. They just know their need and their beginning to grumble.

## 2) You will be tempted to grumble.

### Exodus 15:24 ESV

<sup>24</sup> And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, “What shall we drink?”

Grumbling, or murmuring, is a contagious disease among a people. Its one of the insights of the Hebrew Bible that your actions always follow your words: you are what you say.

In the Bible, the word grumbling always carries two tones: first, an attitude of expectation for a legitimate claim (hunger or thirst), and second, akin to a legal suit of breach of contract. Can you imagine suing God for breach of contract?

But, this is that exposition. What God is doing in the wilderness is stripping all of the comforts of life away to reveal what is truly inside. And that's what trials do. They don't cause us to sin. They are like the sponge that squeezes your heart. **What is revealed was already there.**

- › Have you ever worked with someone who grumbled all the time? Grumbling spreads through a workplace like a disease. Its particularly dangerous among the people of God because it takes our eyes off of the glory of God and focuses us on what God has not yet done for us.

Egypt is still in their hearts in a metaphorical sense. So it is for you, I'm sure. You have pockets of your heart that when they are squeeze the person you were before Christ with its fears, anxieties, tempers is revealed. Occasionally, perhaps, there are explosions from all these bombs.

And yet you are not in Egypt, and some things really have changed. Here's where it gets good guys. Slowly but surely you learn to see that you are not your weaknesses but a child whose weaknesses reveal the strength and kindness of your Father.

## 3) You will learn to hear the Lord's voice.

### Exodus 15:25–26 ESV

<sup>25</sup> And he cried to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the LORD made for them a statute and a rule, and there he tested them, <sup>26</sup> saying, “If you will diligently listen to the voice of the LORD your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, your healer.”

Now I just spent a lot of time talking about how grumbling is a problem.

So, does God answer the prayers of grumblers? Does he answer this prayer because he knows they will die without water? Or, as one commentator pointed out, does he instead answer their grumbling because he is not the kind of God who halfway redeems anyone? He's the kind of God who once starting “a good work in you will bring it to completion.” [Php 1:6–2:2](#).

This is an important miracle story in the Wilderness Journey of Israel, and its one to whom Paul refers in [1 Cor 10](#). The whole point is that God is self-authenticating in his speech-acts.

We aren't even told why a log is thrown: it just is. This miracle was not the event itself—it was so the people would know that God speaks and ought to be obeyed. There a few more like this and you can get down a hole where folks are speculating the mass of mineral salts this would could have soaked. Instead Moses's faith is

revealed because he does what the Lord tells him to do without understanding how or why it would work—at the point, he has enough evidence that God will work.

**Statute and Rule** is another hendiadys (remember you eat one once a week? PB&J!) This is a single statement: live in relationship with me, and my purposes for you will not fail.

#### 4) You will see the provision of God.

The people do not stay in Marah but move on to Elim. God does not keep his people in the wilderness forever but leads them from green pasture to green pasture through the wilderness along the way.

##### **Exodus 15:27 ESV**

<sup>27</sup> Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they encamped there by the water.

The rabbis believed that each of the springs corresponded to the twelve tribes and the seventy palms corresponded to the seventy sages of Israel. Perhaps.

What is certain is this:

Often, after the trials and test of a Marah, God has an Elim prepared for his people. However, neither all Marahs nor all Elims are helpful to God's people. Dealing with nothing but Marah day after day would suck the life out of us. Dealing with nothing but Elim day after day would soften us and never stretch us. A healthy combination is, on the one hand, having our backs against the wall and learning to trust God, and on the other hand,

Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 244.

Now, there is one who really is the water in the desert. Paul has told us in [1 Cor 10](#) that the water in the desert is Christ, and let me tell you something about this Jesus.

Survey John 4> Call to repent as Jesus is living water.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

TDNT for "Wilderness"

Hamilton, Victor P. *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011.