

Wilderness University
Exodus 15:22-17:7

I was the first guy in my family to graduate college. But the other men in my family are still smarter than I am! And they like to let me remind me of it. My father never graduated high school and he still dominates me at **Trivial Pursuit!** I have two uncles that build **million dollar homes** for a living, and never graduated from college either. I helped build homes one summer in Cincinnati with my uncle Danny and he was quick to remind me that though I was in college, he was smarter than me when it came to building homes. His favorite name for me, especially when I couldn't figure out how to do something, was "**college boy.**" **It was his way of reminding me that there are some things that I couldn't learn in the university.**

But as Christians there is a school that we all attend. God trains us, disciplines us, and sanctifies us in "Wilderness University."

Spurgeon called the **wilderness** "**the Oxford and Cambridge for God's students**" ("**Marah Better Than Elim**").

- **Many of you are students here and are wondering if you will ever graduate! But we never graduate from Wilderness U.**

Today we look at Israel's wilderness experience.

"Going through the wilderness was not necessary for Israel's salvation, but it was necessary for their sanctification" Ryken says (414). **Listen to an early church father about the sanctifying purpose of the wilderness:**

After this [Red Sea crossing], Moses, by the command of God, whose providence is over all, led out the people of the Hebrews into the wilderness ... that [He] might *root out the evils which had clung to them* by a long-continued familiarity with the customs of the Egyptians."
(Clement of Rome, emphasis added)

Yes, God is rooting out the evils, which clung to them.

Like Israel, we too are sojourners, who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, who have crossed over to the other side by grace, and are now on the way to Promised Land. In this faith journey, in our wilderness, God is sanctifying us, and teaching us to trust him, love him and follow him.

So the big idea today is that we need to learn some things from Israel's Wilderness experience, since (once again) their story is our story. I want us to consider two parts of the wilderness experience.

First, consider Israel in the wilderness. We'll consider three tests that they took. Second, let's consider Christ in the wilderness. We'll consider three NT connections with Israel's experience.

ISRAEL IN THE WILDERNESS

It is interesting that *three consecutive stories* have to do with food and water! Israel gets hungry and thirsty and complains.

Their grumbling serves as a warning to us. It's also not surprising to us. *How many of you have ever been on a road trip and gotten **irritable** when hungry?*

- One of the biggest parts of the drama of road trips has to do with food. I remember when I took a group of 45 people to Israel, and though they were not grumbling group, there were some complaints about food! Many questions before the trip had to do with food, and many during the trip had to do with food.

So their grumbling about the Wilderness U meal plan doesn't surprise us. Yet, we are not to follow their example. (1 Cor. 10:9-10).

TEST #1: BITTER WATER (22-27)

The first test here is sort of like a "pre-test." It includes a bit of a preview of tests to come, and a mini-covenant that anticipates a more full understanding of God's ways.

22: This is a huge, rugged, wilderness region in the northern Sinai, stretching from what in modern times is the eastern side of the Suez Canal to the Negev of Israel. It was not exactly a great place for 600,000 men plus women and children to be.

23: The problem in the desert is that the water is bitter. So they call it Marah. Our most basic physical need is water, and so the lack of water troubles the Israelites. They were in a desert they thought they found water, only to find it undrinkable.

- How many of you have been **overseas** in a place where you can't drink the water? You live with sort of a fear, always boiling your water, keeping bottles of water, etc.

24: How do they respond? By grumbling against Moses. 'What are we going to drink,'" they asked.

- Complaining and grumbling is a sign of ungratefulness, self-centeredness, immaturity and insecurity. **It's what children do. In mini-vans. And about homework.** We have a chart on our fridge for "whining and arguing." We are trying to teach our kids to be grateful and respectful, and not like the Israelites here.

25: By now, you would think the Israelites would have learned to cry out to God in prayer, rather than complaining. But they are showing their immaturity. But that's exactly what Moses does. And the Lord answers Moses.

- Is your first reaction to trouble, faith-filled prayer or grumbling and anxiety? Some have called anxiety "functional atheism." You don't believe in the God you say you believe in when you worry.

Moses throws a log into the water and the water becomes sweet. Some have tried to find a scientific explanation for this. The best way to understand it is a miracle.

What is amazing here is not just that God can do a miracle, making the water sweet, but that he is *willing to do it for these whiney butts!* This is grace. His grace is sweet.

25b-26: Here God tested his people. He made a small covenant with them, proving the terms of their relationship. He says if you keep my word I will bless you. Heeding his voice and doing what is right included up to this point included Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the consecration of the firstborn. Later, God will reveal more through Moses.

If they do not follow God's ways, then he says that they will experience "diseases" that fell on the Egyptians.

Applications (A, B, C)

A. Notice the **pattern**. Israel is already saved, and now they begin to learn about obedience and following Gods' Word. *These requirements weren't the basis of their salvation. They were given after they were saved to teach them how to now live for God's glory. The same pattern is the 10 Commandments. "I brought you out of Egypt" 20:2), now follow my word. Don't confuse the order.*

B. Notice also that God provides another name. He is "**Yahweh-rophe**, **"the God who heals."** Here again is a pattern in Exodus. God does wonders so everyone may know that He is the LORD. Next week, he will conquer one of Israel's enemies, and provide another

name (17:15). Here it is "rophe." Ryken says, "rophe" refers to "wellness and soundness, both physically and spiritually." The miracle at Marah shows that God can heal the waters and the body. He is the restorer.

Illustration: Winfield – Praying for Sick (James 5:14-ff.) - normally do this in a home, but we're ready on Sunday .

27: After the note about healing, we see a beautiful picture. God brings the people to Elim, "where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees." The text says, "they camped there by the water." Wherever this was located, it was obviously a place of abundance and refreshment.

C. Before moving to the second test, an additional lesson. God is able to care for his people by a miracle (healing the water), or by his providence (taking them to a place that has water). Both are gifts. If God is caring for you in either way, then be humbly grateful.

TEST #2: BREAD FROM HEAVEN (1-36)

This is long and important story, which is referred to in numerous places in different ways elsewhere in Scripture. **Let's Read.** (Insert entire story in commentary, 16:1-36).

1-12: After setting out from Elim, Israel **complains** against Moses regarding food. In his mercy, the Lord provides both manna and quail. Over and over we read about Israel's "grumbling" (**2, 7, 8, 11**).

Complaining is a serious sin ... more serious than you might think (See 1 Cor. 10:1-12. Notice the sins mentioned here).

What did the children of Israel complain about? They grumbled under **Pharaoh** (2:23) They grumbled at the **Red Sea** (14:11-12) They grumbled at **Marah** (15:23-24) They grumbled about their **leaders** (16:2-3, 17:3-4; also Numbers 11). Paul says, "Do all things without grumbling and complaining" (Phil. 2:14).

God just did a miracle turning bitter water into sweet water. He has shown Israel that he will care for them. Yet, they still complain. What would you have done, if you had brought out the people from Egypt and they began to murmur saying, "in Egypt we sat beside meat pots?" I would have been angry.

I remember coming back from Ukraine with our four kids, and taking them to Corky's Barbecue in Memphis! I was so excited. After all, we had been eating food that was not that appetizing. I asked them what they wanted, and they picked out some barbecue. When I sat it down, they complained and said they didn't want it! This was after a 27 hour trip! I banged my elbow on the table and said, "Eat it!" I was so upset because I thought they were ungrateful. I thought they should be excited. But that isn't God's reaction here. He still provides for them in spite of their sin.

The provision of manna includes a number of important lessons. Let's look at the nature of this provision and make some running application. Consider four aspects God's Provision:

4 Characteristics of God's Provision:

1. It Was Supernatural (11-15)

God miraculously provided bread from heaven (Read **16:4a, 11-13**).

Now, most people work for bread. That's the way God designed it. Paul tells us that a man, who isn't willing to work, shouldn't eat (**2 Thess. 3:10**).

But our work is toilsome. In **Genesis 3**, God speaks to Adam and says that one of the results of the fall for men is that their work will be difficult. He says, "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread" (**3:19a**). So from the beginning, *bread was/is a result of man's hard labor*.

Most of the world has not lived like us. We go to **the grocery store**, and we have raisin bread, wheat bread, and more. But most people have had to work diligently to have bread throughout history.

Supernatural

But notice Israel is receiving bread from heaven! It is a supernatural provision of God. They receive bread apart from their labor (except for going to collect it)! And God did it for 40 years! (**35**).

Another sign that this was miraculous is how the Israelites respond to the manna. They call it "manna" which appears to be related by similar sound to the expression "**what is it?**" (**14-15, 31**). They are totally mystified by it, showing us that they'd never seen anything like it. Verse 31 gives a further description: "It was like a coriander seed, white, and the taste was like wafers made with honey" (**31b**). It

was apparently very tasty! It was a foretaste of the land flowing with milk and honey. Some have tried to give human explanation of this, saying this was something that was common in the wilderness. That's not the picture here. This was a curious type of wafer with honey.

The Psalmist says, it was “the bread of angels” (Ps. 78:25).

Further, they also receive quail on one particular day, in spite of their grumbling! (12-13). These quail fly in and are able to be captured by hand! God provided meat just as he said. The Psalmists says “he rained meat on them like dust, winged birds like the sand of the sea” (Ps. 78:27).

2. It Was Sufficient (16:16-30).

A. God Gives Enough for the Day (15-21)

The text says that God gave them manna every day for 40 years. God also says, “Don't try to hoard it.” If they think, “*Hey, this **crispy crème** stuff is pretty good, I think I'll save some, in case God doesn't keep his word,*” then they will learn that God is providing enough for their daily bread only. Each person was to gather as much as they could eat, “and whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had not lack.” (18).

An Implication of God's Provision: Give as God blesses you!”

Paul cites this text in **2 Cor. 8:15**, “As it is written, ‘Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.’” Paul encourages Corinthian Christians to give generously for those in need. He reminds them **not to hoard the good gifts of God**. Later Paul goes on to say more about God's sufficiency and how we should be cheerful givers (2 Cor. 9:6-15).

A Word about Giving at IDC. We don't rail on people about tithing. We simply say in our covenant (under “Stewardship”):

- *We covenant that we will give **cheerfully, regularly, and generously** to the support of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the Gospel both in our city and through all nations (2 Cor. 8-9). We know much of our resources will go to the “support of the church” because we are a church that is six months old, and over time more will go out (though some is going out now).*

- While we don't expect everyone to give the same percentage, we do expect every member to give. If you are a member of IDC, let me remind you that *you have signed a covenant to give* “generously, cheerfully, and regularly.”

They were told not to leave it until morning to gather later, but some tried, and it bred worms and stank (20a). Once again, they fail to trust God.

I remember when we were eating crackers once after we got our kids, and we found worms in them! It was totally disgusting! We went out to eat.

B. God Gives Enough for the Sabbath (22-30)

So God is teaching them about “daily bread.” He is their provider every day. The exception to the day-by-day rule was the sixth day (22). On that day, they were allowed to collect enough for the Sabbath. God is teaching them about the solemn rest they need. In this case, the bread will not have worms in it (24).

In verses 27-30, again they fail to trust God & listen, and go out to find bread on the seventh day, but they find none, and they receive God's rebuke.

In the giving of the Ten Commandments, the 4th begins with “Remember” the Sabbath... It assumes that they were familiar with the idea of resting on the fourth day. They knew about it from the **manna experience**, and of course the Sabbath goes back to **creation**.

The Israelites had a hard time believing that God would provide for them if they kept the Sabbath! It sounds like people today! The Sabbath was a day for rest, and it distinguished the Israelites from the Egyptians and surrounding nations.

3. It Was Sacred (16:31-35)

God told Moses to save a bit of the manna (34). Eventually it was placed in the ark, along with the “testimony” which refers to the two tablets with the Ten Commandments (Heb. 9:4). The ark had not been built yet (Ex. 25:10-22; 37:1-9). It served as a way of reminding the people God's mighty salvation and his provision.

- Throughout the Exodus, they are told to do several things to “remember.” Last week we did a Seder meal, and it was incredible. **How many of you will ever forget eating the bitter herbs? I think**

Mark liked that too much. God didn't want his people to forget his blessings.

35: He cared for them with manna throughout the Exodus, until they entered the Promised Land. We read in Joshua:

[12] And the manna ceased the day after they ate of the produce of the land. And there was no longer manna for the people of Israel, but they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year. (Joshua 5:12 ESV)

4. It Was Sanctifying (Deut. 8:3)

In Deuteronomy, Moses reflects on the manna, and he says that the miracle bread was not intended to just sustain them physically. It was also intended to teach them a deeply spiritual lesson. What was that lesson? Listen to Deuteronomy 8:2-3:

[2] And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, **that he might humble you**, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. [3] **And he humbled you and let you hunger** and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, **that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.** (Deuteronomy 8:2-3 ESV)

God wasn't just filling their bellies, he was trying to shepherd their hearts. He said that this experience was intended to "humble them," and teach them to depend on God's Word. God was disciplining them, shaping them.

He said, I'll provide bread, all you need to live and worship me, now believe me!

We need God's Word every day just as the Israelites needed manna every day. The God who was worthy to be trusted for bread, is the God who is worth listening to everyday. He sanctifies us through his word (**John 17:17**).

TEST #3: WATER FROM THE ROCK (17:1-7)

1-3: As the Israelites move on, this time in "Rephidim," they had no water. Instead of trusting God, and seeking God, once again they do something else. They "quarreled with Moses" (2) They demand water, and they "grumble" against Moses (3).

7: At the end we read how they were also asking, “Is the LORD among us or not?” This is awful. Therefore, they name the place “Massah and Meribah,” which means testing and quarreling (cf. Ps 95). Instead of trusting God, they’re testing God. **So think about what they’re doing:**

A. They **Demanded** God’s Provision (2a) *Give us water to drink*

We do the same thing when we make demands on God at home or in the church **insisting that He work on our terms.**

There are times in which we **must wait on the Lord patiently.**

B. They **Questioned** God’s protection (3) *“Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us...?”*

We do this when we accuse God of trying to harm us in our trial. We should remember that he has brought us through a greater Exodus, he is worthy of total trust.

C. They **Doubted** God’s presence (7) *“Is the LORD among us or not?”*

- We do this when we think God has abandoned us in our wilderness.
- I love **Matt Redman's** song "Never once did we ever walk alone, never once did you leave us all alone, you are faithful, God you are faithful." Never once, will you ever walk alone.

None of these accusations were **true**.

- Israel’s great problem was that they refused to **remember** who God is and what He had done. (See Psalm 106:13a, 95:9). One obvious remedy to our own discontent and unbelief is to remember what God has done for us in .

What Did God Do? (17:4-6)

- Moses prayed and God **provided** water from the Rock (4-6).
- God appears at Horeb where God first met with Moses in the burning bush.

- Notice the scene described in Psalm 105:41: “He opened the rock, and water gushed out; it flowed through the desert like a river.”

The text doesn't say how God appeared specifically. But God appears and the people are saved through the miraculous provision of water, as Moses strikes the rock with his staff.

Later, he is told to **speak** to the rock, but he instead strikes it twice, and God is angered by this. So much so that Moses can't enter the Promised Land because he fails to obey God (**Numbers 20:10-12**).

This miracle demonstrated that God didn't bring them out to the wilderness to kill them, and that he was indeed with them.

CHRIST IN THE WILDERNESS

3 Connections to Jesus:

#1: CHRIST PASSED THE TEST THAT ISRAEL FAILED

(Matt 4:2-3)

We desperately needed Jesus because no one could pass the test. We couldn't keep God's law. But Jesus, the true Son, kept God's law perfectly.

It's what we call the active obedience of Christ. Christ lived the life we could not live.

We get a picture of Jesus succeeding where Israel failed in **Matthew 4/Luke 4**. After Jesus goes through the waters of Jordan, he is tempted for 40 days, and the first temptation is about bread. The tempter says, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread.” (**Matt. 4:3**). What does Jesus quote? He quotes Deuteronomy 8:3: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Often what we think Jesus is doing in the wilderness for 40 days is showing us why we should do **Bible memorization**.

Bible memorization is immensely valuable, but the primary thing going on here is that the authors are showing us that there is a true and better Israel who passed the test in the wilderness triumphantly. And he would pass every test, fulfilling God's law perfectly.

Unlike Israel and us, Jesus did not yield to temptation, and he did not grumble in his obedience. He is the one we need.

**#2: CHRIST IS THE BREAD WE NEED FOR ETERNAL LIFE
(John 6:25-59)**

After Jesus did the miracle of bread in John 6, everyone wanted to follow him. But Jesus knew their hearts. He says,

“Do not labor for food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you” (27)

The people don’t fully understand and they say, “what sign do you do that we may see and believe you?” (30). Then they bring up manna, “Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat (31).

Jesus had actually already given them a sign. He had fed the multitude. He was the true and better Moses. But what was most important to Jesus was spiritual life. So he turns the discussion:

[32] Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. [33] For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” [34] They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

[35] Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever **believes** in me shall never thirst. [36] But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.

(John 6:32-36 ESV)

Jesus is saying, I can do more than supply bread, and you need more than bread. He is saying I Am the Bread of Life, and without me you can’t live forever.

Notice what they do in verse 41-42. They do exactly as the Israelites: they grumble.

[41] So the Jews **grumbled** about him, because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” [42] They said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?”

(John 6:41-42 ESV)

They wanted salvation on their own terms. God has given us salvation in Christ, the Bread of Life, and people still grumble at the

thought of a crucified Savior, or that there's only one way. They should instead fall on their knees and say "yes, I will take Christ and live forever."

Jesus goes on to say that *some will come to him* (37). He says that those who come, will come by faith, and they will "eat his flesh," meaning that they will receive him by faith.

[44] No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. [45] It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me—[46] not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father

[47] Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. [48] I am the bread of life. [49] **Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.** [50] This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. [51] I am the living bread that came down from heaven. **If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.** And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

Notice how he says that they ate, and they died! But if you take Christ, you never die!

[52] The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" [53] So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. [54] Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. [55] For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. [56] Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. [57] As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. [58] This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." (**John 6:44-46; John 6:47-58 ESV**)

Obviously, Jesus wasn't speaking about literally eating him. He was speaking about believing in him (notice the repetition of "believe"). Believe in Him and find satisfaction for your soul, and live forever.

The religious leaders were looking for a list of things to do to have this bread. They had their pad and paper. But Jesus says, you simply believe.

#3: CHRIST IS THE ROCK THAT WAS STRICKEN FOR OUR SALVATION (1 Cor. 10:1-5)

Paul says that the rock was Christ.

I take this to mean that the rock was a type of Christ.

Moses struck the rock, instead of the people, and water flowed to save people.

Jesus, the rock, was stricken for our salvation.

Instead of striking us, God struck the Son.

It is interesting that Moses is told not to *strike the rock again*.

The second time he is told *to speak to the rock*.

Like this rock, Jesus was stricken ... **one time!** – after that, he is to be spoken to.

When he was stricken, water flowed from his side (**John 19:34**). He died the death we deserved to die.

Now we drink from the water of life for eternal life (**John 7:37-38**). By believing in Jesus we drink from the water.

So, Jesus gave us the water he desperately needed, and that water could only come through striking. One time. You don't strike the rock after that.

Isaiah says:

[4] Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.

[5] But he was **pierced** for our transgressions;
he was **crushed** for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought
us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.

[6] All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.
(Isaiah 53:4-6 ESV)

He was wounded, stricken, pierced, crushed for our iniquity.

He did not open up his mouth, as a lamb led to the slaughter. He submitted to God's will. He did not grumble. He took our judgement that we may know God's salvation. Praise the Rock!

TWO RESPONSES TO THE WILDERNESS STORY

#1: Trust in God's Providence for Your Daily Needs.

- **Israel's wilderness experience shows us that God is with his people.**
- **Israel's wilderness experience shows us that God provides for his people.**
- **Will you trust him, or grumble and worry?**

#2: Trust in God's Son for Your Deepest Needs.

- **Trust in the one who lived the life you couldn't live. He passed the test we couldn't pass.**
- **Trust in the one who is the bread you can't live without. Receive him and live!**
- **Trust in the one who was struck for your salvation. Drink and live!**