

Good Morning!

Does it seem a little like Déjà vu?

Thank you for your encouragement and support as we've had to change direction in terms of speaker and topic.

Pray with me

Father, we praise you and exalt your name today. You are the Lord of heaven and earth and you brought us to this very moment. Spirit of the living Christ be at work in us this morning as we look at the wilderness and much of what it entails. Open our hearts, guard my mouth, fill us with comfort and wonder as we dwell upon your truth.

In Jesus Name,

Amen

Wilderness Dynamics**We've heard the phrase often, haven't we?**

- We've contemplated and analyzed Israel's wilderness experience
- We've gleaned from Jesus' wilderness experience
- Yet it's difficult to actually wrap our minds around how comprehensive the topic of the wilderness is in the Bible. It's in Genesis and Revelation and many, many places in-between
- It's not defined in Scripture-like many other important concepts in scripture
 1. Kingdom last year
 2. Church-no definition but over 80 images
 3. Atonement

God uses many devices to reveal truth to us in the Bible.

He mostly brings us truth through

- Pictures
- Images
- Rather than definitions

God knows how we were made and he knows the best way for us to learn and understand him.

Carmen Joy Imes- in her book, "Bearing God's Name says:

"In the chamber of the desert, that **liminal space**, competing interpretations try to make sense of Israel's wilderness experiences."

Imes uses the term liminal to help us make sense of the wilderness

"Uncertain transitions between where you've been and where you're going" involves discomfort, feelings of doubt and isolation and difficulty. Liminal spaces are temporary spaces

Biblically the wilderness is a liminal space

That space between Moses leading God's people out of Egypt and the promised land of Canaan - doorway to Canaan

Something happened-but more is to come!

This is more than Geography- Metaphorical use as well

You can probably think of other liminal spaces in life?

- Childhood
- College

- Pregnancy
- Parenting
- Chemotherapy

**ONE thing to remember about Liminal spaces-
They expose our rough edges.**

Word pictures associated with WILDERNESS:

- Location of intense experiences
- Place of testing
- Lonely
- Luke 11:25 Waterless place-Desert
- A place where flourishing is difficult
- Apparent desolation
- Stark need
- Scarcity
- Uninhabitable land

But it's also: a place of

- Formation
- Becoming
- Preparation
- Testing
- Provision
- God's presence
- blessing

Wilderness

- Occurs in Bible nearly 300 times
- 3 words are translated into wilderness: Midbar, arabah, and Tohu wabohu
- Complicated phrases are not easy to find an exact English translation.

- First mention-Genesis 1:2

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and the earth was FORMLESS and VOID.”

- Chaos
 - Tohu wabohu
 - No life
 - Chaos
 - Formless & void
- And we can see the relation to wilderness experiences
- Phrase used by theologians to refer to
 - Israel’s experience
 - And our experience (Paul I Corinthians)

Why would God bring his people to a place like this?

*****There are lessons learned in the wilderness that cannot be learned anywhere else.**

The Wilderness

- was NOT wasted years for Israel-nor for you.

They were and are years of

- Training
- Becoming
- Humbling
- Testing
- Formation
- Provision
- God’s presence
- Blessings-yes Blessing.
- Punishment-that too. Their disobedience did result in 39 more years of wandering. But it was so much more than this.

The wilderness teaches us that the single greatest threat to our survival and well-being is NOT

- Scarcity of provisions or
- Lack of comfort
- Or any other circumstance of the wilderness

“The Single Greatest threat to Israel during their time in the wilderness was themselves” CJI

Their behavior fueled by unbelieving hearts was enough to make Moses wish he were dead. (Numbers 11:14-15)

They were enemy # 1

Pogo- Comic-“ I have met the enemy and he is us.”

The same is true for you and I

we can blame:

- Our husbands
- Our kids
- Our boss
- Our Finances
- Our giftedness (Lack of)

Isn't that what we often do?

We blame God or others for our miserable state

We develop wanton cravings to dull our disappointments

Israel erroneously sought excessive comfort and practiced finger pointing and so do we

EXCESSIVE comfort does dull the impact of the wilderness but also our ability to see our need for God

We live in unprecedented physical and economic abundance so our wilderness comes through other hardships

- Loss
- Relationships
- Health
- If we can't find contentment in the wilderness we won't find it in the promised land either
- The God in the Wilderness is the same as the God in the Promised land

We will be mostly in the book of Numbers today

Raise your hand if the book of Numbers is your favorite book in the Bible?

The Wilderness experience in the book of numbers gives us some very important insight:

- It confronts us and challenges us to live faithfully as pilgrims and aliens in a wilderness world.
- It encourages us to look to the one who has gone thru this wilderness ahead of us.

It's a difficult book to understand. Numbers is to the Bible as Dostoyevsky is to literature. (Iain Duguid)

Yet it's God's work and we should seek to understand it.

- It's not simply a book about ANE history- it is a Christ centered book

- The Gospel was not a new invention in 1 C. Palestine-it's the center of the whole Bible
- The Gospel is the hermeneutical key to understanding the book of numbers
- This can be confusing
- At first blush we often miss this

Numbers: The Hebrew title for this book is The Wilderness

Adding to the difficulty-

- Doesn't have a beginning-it doesn't start at the beginning of the story
- Grammatically in Hebrew it starts in mid-sentence
- This links back to the preceding book
- WHY? It was never meant to stand alone. (part of Pentateuch)
- It doesn't have a conclusive ending but it does have a great ending
- It ends with the daughters of Zelophehad's daughters request for their share of the promised land -even though the law did not make provisions for this.
- Book starts and ends in the wilderness
- Bookends 30 years out of 40 of wandering
- In some ways-Israel came back full circle from where they started

Circular Narrative structure

- Not an error
- Mark of Author's literary skill
- The structure is part of his message
- The medium is the message
- You'll notice this in my sessions as well

Numbers is a story of 2 generations

- 1- Generation who Moses rescued from Egypt
- 2- Their descendants

Why Does God bring his people the long way? A one year journey turned into 40 years

Because there are some lessons that can only be learned in the fertile soil of the wilderness

- **We think of the wilderness as an unfertile place-Not true on all levels**

God's Provisions in the Wilderness

Provision

Exodus 16:1-3 There was indeed a lack of adequate food and water-Life support

God answers their complaints with:

- Manna
- Quail
- Water
- Rest-Sabbath

ALL in abundance.

The ground was covered with food every morning-bread from heaven-Foreshadows John 6-Jesus is the bread of life

Water gushed from the rock-White Tanks story

Numbers 20:2-12

New International Version

² Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron. ³ They quarreled with Moses and said, "If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the LORD! ⁴ Why did you bring the LORD's community into this wilderness, that we and our livestock should die here? ⁵ Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!"

⁶ Moses and Aaron went from the assembly to the entrance to the tent of meeting and fell facedown, and the glory of the LORD appeared to them. ⁷ The LORD said to Moses, ⁸ "Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink."

⁹ So Moses took the staff from the LORD's presence, just as he commanded him. ¹⁰ He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" ¹¹ Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank.

This foreshadows the living water that Jesus is- I Corinthians 10:4

The desert which seemed a threat, has become a nurturing place under Yahweh's care

They had to rely on God for each days supply without anxious hording and God always provided

Yet..... In their anxiety over provisions they were willing to make a very poor trade-They wanted to back to slavery in Egypt

Their anxiety distorts the memory of the past

We can yearn for the past with some kind of euphoric recall-but this is often a lie

Before I got married

Before I had kids.....

During the wilderness we sometimes conflate our dependence-

We pray the Lord's Prayer

"Give us this day our daily bread"

Yet we live in endless anxiety and the only way out is to make a clean unambiguous decision to trust God

I know I'm being captain obvious here- but these are our choices in the wilderness

Trust God

or trust man

- God knows what is needed

"My God will supply all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:19

If God gave us his son, won't he surely give us all things?

In the Eucharist-we are reminded every week-There is another bread that is given , blessed and broken- Look to Christ as he's provided for you in the gospel.

SABBATH

For 6 days they could gather their daily food. What they didn't eat that day would rot. God told Moses to command the people to rest on the 7th day.

But on the 6th day-they could collect enough for 2 days without any rotting.

- God knew they needed rest
- A time to be refreshed and to recharge

- A day set apart to be Holy
- Rest from work
- Time to reflect on God
- God was not a harsh task master like Pharaoh
- This should have been fresh in their minds as they whined about going back to Egypt
- Without this Sabbath rest God's people would have fallen into weariness.
- Hebrews 4 tells us that this wilderness Sabbath also speaks of another rest. That ends the liminal wilderness
- TODAY
Are you weary? Are you obeying God by resting on the Sabbath?
- If not-obedience in the wilderness is more difficult

PASSOVER

God also commanded that his people observe the Passover in the wilderness.

Why:

- Rehearse the story of God's mighty acts in bringing them out of slavery
- They, like us, were prone to forget.

God's Presence

God's presence was in the wilderness

Pillar of Cloud- God led his people and guided them out of Egypt and safely through the wilderness

Fire by night-At night God's Presence is still guiding them

The Ark of the Covenant-led the procession

These are symbols of God's protection, guidance and leadership

Tabernacle

- God pitched his tent among them
- He "tabernacled" with his people
- His glory was in their midst
- God ordered them to place his tent in the middle of the encampment
- It was to be the center of their lives
- He came down to live among his people-does this sound familiar-a foreshadow of the incarnation

The Pillar, the Cloud, and the Tabernacle, the Ark-visible signs of God's presence

Allowed them to travel safely through the Wilderness

Today –

- We don't have these visible signs.
- Cloud
- Pillar of fire
- Ark
- Tabernacle
- We have something better
- **God's Spirit** was given to the Church at Christ's ascension-He lives in the hearts of Christians
- **We have the complete written word of God**
- **The Church- the pillar of truth (I Timothy 3:15)**

So.....

Day after day, year after year the Israelites were positioned to trust God-

To look upon his manifest glory through the miracles of bread and meat which rained on them from heaven, and the water that gushed from the rock. His tent in the middle of the camp, fire and cloud

All visible reminders of his presence and provision

Yet they fell into despair and missed his glory.

Christ promised his disciples one sure thing in this world

Tribulation –Wilderness

And he has been faithful to this promise-tribulation

You live in this reality every day

But that was not his only promise-Matt 28:20 I will never leave you or forsake you. You see....

The Wilderness was a place of God's presence

- Deuteronomy 2:7
“For the Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hand. He knows your trudging through his great wilderness. These 40 years he has been with you and you have lacked nothing.”
- He's ordained every wilderness experience
- His eyes have not missed one thing:
 1. There is not a step Israel or you've taken that he's missed
 2. A pain you've endured
 3. A tear you've shed
 4. A cry you delivered that God has missed.

TODAY:

- You may feel like you cannot endure one more piece of bad news
- You may feel stalled in your life- you move from one empty boring day to the next. Lather, Rinse, repeat
- You may feel like your dreams are dead

- Everything around you feels lifeless
- Some have you have experienced unthinkable loss

REMEMBER

There are lessons here to learn that you can't learn any other way. And God has seen, heard your pain and never left your side.

You may not be able to change its duration, but you can change your response to the wilderness you're experiencing

But Jesus promised his disciples his presence through the wilderness of this world and because he overcame this world, we can be of good cheer. (John 16:33)

Reactions to the Wilderness

1. **Unbelief**-you don't believe that God is good and that he is for you
2. **Cynicism**-God will never change this
He doesn't Care about my well-being, -waiting for the other shoe to drop
3. **Sullenness**-Ex 16:13 "If only we had died in Egypt..."
4. **Skepticism-Exodus 14** "Why did you bring us out of Egypt only to die in the desert?
 - **This impugns God and Moses' motives**
5. **Israel known for their constant Complaining**-food, water, leadership

Their response shows that they needed another lap around Mt Sinai and sometimes so do we.

Let's be clear

It's not sin to:

- Be disappointed
- Hurt
- Not pretend that everything is ok (It's not)

We need to feel these things, sit in them, and process them with the Lord and others

But it's never ok to:

- question God's goodness,
- rebel, despair or
- fall into unbelief
- Fall into complaining (Philippians 2:14)

Numbers shows us what happens to the generation that refuses to place their trust in Yahweh despite his manifest blessings in the midst of trials

They were unable to enter his rest and their bodies are scattered over the wilderness ~Ian Duguid

The first generation- died in the wilderness-Only Joshua and Caleb entered the promised land

Numbers 27-36

Starts with the story of the next generation-the story that begins and ends with

Zelophehad's daughters

1 The daughters of Zelophehad son of Hopher, the son of Gilead, the son of Makir, the son of Manasseh, belonged to the clans of Manasseh son of Joseph. The names of the daughters were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milkah and Tirzah. They came forward

2 and stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the leaders and the whole assembly at the entrance to the tent of meeting and said,

3 “Our father died in the wilderness. He was not among Korah’s followers, who banded together against the LORD, but he died for his own sin and left no sons.

4 Why should our father’s name disappear from his clan because he had no son? Give us property among our father’s relatives.”

5 So Moses brought their case before the LORD,

These women of faith are emblematic of the new generation

They were deeply concerned about ensuring that their descendants would have their inheritance in the Promised Land and by faith petitioned Moses for their portion

EVEN THOUGH= at the time of their request not one inch of Canaan had been conquered and women were not allowed to own property

- Zelophehad’s daughters
 - Noah
 - Mahlah
 - Tirzah
 - Milcah
 - Hoglah

- Believed firmly in the promises of God and acted on it
- Claimed a share of the future inheritance

Theirs was the generation that lived by faith not fear

Oh Israel would continue to sin

But they too lived in liminality

The book of Numbers is

- Written to a people whose lives are lived between the accomplishment of their redemption and its final consummation.
- Between the Exodus and the promised land
- Between the promised land and their final resting place in the new creation
- Their experiences in the wilderness was NOT one of total fullness-even with God's provisions

Does this resonate with you?

“We live as they did between salvation accomplished and salvation completed”

Between Christ's work on the cross where our salvation is secured

And the time when that salvation is brought into its fullness-when Christ returns and completes the renewal of Heaven and Earth

We should surely be able to identify with the experiences and temptations of the first wilderness Generation.

But we are to live out our time here with the faith of generation 2

With eyes fixed on Jesus-believing promises as yet unseen

Are you beholding the glory of God in Christ in the wilderness?

The word became flesh and dwelt among us

Jesus is the true and better tabernacle and he's right in your very midst.

Pray

Let's Pray

Father, thank you that your presence is an unchanging reality. Thank you that you never leave us or forsake us. Thank you for your provision too. We are so blessed. Gives us eyes to see and hearts to believe your goodness, even in the wilderness. We are weak. We need your help, and we ask for it this morning.

Amen

In session 1 we saw what the wilderness was like

What it produced in the hearts of God's people

And we were reminded of God's provision and presence

I introduced the metaphorical use of the wilderness to represent our trials –I want to expand on this.

We need a correct perspective of the afflictions in our lives

- Our wilderness trials are handpicked, ordained for us by God
- The puritans are very helpful in understanding this
- They called our trials
- The Crook in our lot
- Sometimes reading the Puritans gets on my nerves
- I'm sure I'm the problem
- They emphasize holiness and it reminds me of my lack of holiness
- Their teachings need to be contextualized for our time and some are doing great work here

BARB DUGUID- Extravagant Grace- John Newton influenced by his puritan Mother

JOHN Piper- Jonathan Edwards

Kirk Lundgaard- The Enemy Within-John Owens

WE NEED THE PURITANS

Puritan Thomas Boston wrote a book called

“The Crook in the Lot”

- The title is not in modern vernacular-what is a crook in a lot?
- The crook refers to our afflictions
- The Lot refers to our lives
- So the Crook in the lot means-the Trials in our lives

BOSTON asks the question

Are you seeing the circumstances of your life through the lens of faith?

Israel struggled with this

The struggle is real.

Our default is to ask God to take our crooks from our lives

- This is right to do
- Jesus did in Gethsemane
- But our second prayer should be
“Lord keep me here until I learn what you have for me.

SOLOMON tell us

- The House of mourning is preferable to the house of feasting
- Sorrow preferable to joy
- Because while the latter of both of these situations are pleasant the former are more profitable
- Solomon is trying to dissuade us from being angry with our lot
- Today-Are you angry with your lot?

Tips for the wilderness Journey

Seek Holy Wisdom

- **Hear from those who's faith is strong**
- Enables us to make the best of everything
- **Gives life in the midst of harsh circumstances**
- For me- this seems almost impossible
- But I know people like this and you do too
- The wilderness has taught them to see the crook in their lot through the eyes of faith
- That's what we need isn't it?
- **Hebrews 3:13** tell us to "Encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called today, to that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin

The deceitfulness of sin tells us that

- God isn't answering my prayers
- He doesn't love me or I wouldn't be going through this trial
- I can't have joy in my current circumstances

-encourage one another

- **Make room for those who live out their wilderness through the eyes of faith**
- Application- take out a godly woman –someone in their 70's or above
- Ask them how God brought them through the trials in their life
- These are the saints that have learned Paul's secret of being content in all circumstance Philippians 4:11
- They have a mindset of gratitude and reliance in the face of challenges

Remember

- God ordains the crook in your lot
- There is a certain train or course of events, by the providence of God that falls to every one of us

- This train of events is widely different from person to person
- This is due to the pleasure of your sovereign creator

Stop

- **Comparing** your lot to others
- get your eyes off of others-it will lead you to envy
- Stop, stop, stop
- Don't waste one more minute of giving Satan an inch of this territory
- You don't know what wilderness others have gone through-or what awaits them
- And if they haven't yet taken a lap around Mount Sinai- if their lot has only been agreeable thus far-Pray for them
- Don't envy them
- Remember Jesus' words- "In this life you will have tribulation"
- Each person feels for himself where he is afflicted, even though others don't perceive it
- **Stop** dwelling on your lot too much
- Does this sound strange?
- I'm just saying be aware of giving too much thought
- Don't dwell on your trials too much
- It leads to despair and sin

Bring your wilderness tears and fears to God

- The only way to straighten the crook in your lot is by bringing it to God and waiting patiently to work out his will for you in this life.
- It may take a very long time
- It may not resolve itself this side of heaven-personal example
- **Rehearse God's blessings**
- **Israel** forgot God's blessings when they were in the wilderness
- **They** saw with their own eyes God's mighty deeds
- **How God put down** the false Egyptian gods

- **They saw Moses** part the Red Sea
- **Their feet walked on dry land**
- And they forgot it all because of a short time of struggle
- If you are in the wilderness
 - Have you forgot God's blessings
 - Thank God for your husband
 - Thank God for your kids
 - Thank God for your parents
 - Your friends, your home
 - Thank God for school, your teachers

Has the crook in your lot engulfed you to the point where you've forgotten his blessings?

Ian Duguid puts it this way

"Are you so concerned about the worries and cares of life, uncertain that the Father will protect you? That is why you are so tied up in knots about your life and future, You have forgotten your father's sure favor and through which it was brought."

In the wilderness rehearse God's blessing

- **But don't wait until then**
- Far better to rehearse them in seasons of peace

Remember in Prince Caspian when Aslan tells Eustace and Jill

To rehearse the signs-say them when you lie down

When you rise up

When you walk by the way

SOUND Familiar? It echoes Deuteronomy 6

Aslan warns them

That the air on the mountain top is unlike the air in Narnia and he warned them that their thoughts would become muddled there

There is a tendency for our thoughts to become hijacked and muddled in the wilderness

- Rehearse God's love
- Rehearse the Gospel
- Rehearse the promises of your final resting place and the hope of the new creation

Don't make rash decision

- **Be very careful-** that in the wilderness you don't make life changing decisions (divorce, move, change churches, seek the attention of other men
- **It is tempting to think we can fix our** circumstances and cut short our wilderness experience
- **This is foolish and dangerous**

Avoid the Foolish

- Avoid the "misery loves company" companion
 - There are times when someone who's had the same or similar wilderness experience can be of great comfort-that's not what I'm talking about
 - I'm prone to seek the "Fellowship of the disgruntled"
 - "We need to vent" Venting vs processing
 - It makes me feel justified in my complaining
 - This is contagious
 - We can feed off each other in these circumstances
 - When this happens-we get sucked into other sinful patterns
- Constant Complaining
- Fear
- Anxiety

Are contagious- be careful

- The wilderness is not an excuse to sin
- Christ told us to come to us-that he is gentle and lowly
- That's how we need to approach God as well

God does not coddle our sin in the wilderness

- Numbers 16:32-33
 1. Korah and 250 priestly pretenders were annihilated
 2. They criticized the leadership God had provided for them
 3. Moses response-"You Levites have Gone too far!
It is lengthy put I want to read this passage

Korah, Dathan and Abiram

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⁸ Moses also said to Korah, "Now listen, you Levites! ⁹ Isn't it enough for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the rest of the Israelite community and brought you near himself to do the work at the LORD's tabernacle and to stand before the community and minister to them? ¹⁰ He has brought you and all your fellow Levites near himself, but now you are trying to get the priesthood too. ¹¹ It is against the LORD that you and all your followers have banded together. Who is Aaron that you should grumble against him?"

¹² Then Moses summoned Dathan and Abiram But they said, "We will not come! ¹³ Isn't it enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness? And now you also want to lord it over us! ¹⁴ Moreover, you haven't brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey or given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Do you want to treat these men like slaves^b? No, we will not come!"

¹⁵ Then Moses became very angry and said to the LORD, "Do not accept their offering. I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, nor have I wronged any of them."

¹⁶ Moses said to Korah, "You and all your followers are to appear before the LORD tomorrow—you and they and Aaron. ¹⁷ Each man is to take his censer and put incense in it—250 censers in all—and present it before the LORD. You and Aaron are to present your censers also." ¹⁸ So each of them took his censer, put burning coals and incense in it, and stood with Moses and Aaron at the entrance to the tent of meeting. ¹⁹ When Korah had gathered all his followers in opposition to them at the entrance to the tent of meeting, the glory of the LORD appeared to the entire

assembly. ²⁰ The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ²¹ “Separate yourselves from this assembly so I can put an end to them at once.”

²² But Moses and Aaron fell facedown and cried out, “O God, the God who gives breath to all living things, will you be angry with the entire assembly when only one man sins?”

²³ Then the LORD said to Moses, ²⁴ “Say to the assembly, ‘Move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.’”

²⁵ Moses got up and went to the elders of Israel followed him. ²⁶ He warned the assembly, “Move back from the tents of these wicked men! Do not touch anything belonging to them, or you will be swept away because of all their sins.” ²⁷ So they moved away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Dathan and Abiram had come out and were standing with their wives, children and little ones at the entrances to their tents.

²⁸ Then Moses said, “This is how you will know that the LORD has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my idea: ²⁹ If these men die a natural death and suffer the fate of all mankind, then the LORD has not sent me. ³⁰ But if the LORD brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the realm of the dead, then you will know that these men have treated the LORD with contempt.”

³¹ As soon as he finished saying all this, the ground under them split apart ³² and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households, and all those associated with Korah, together with their possessions. ³³ They went down alive into the realm of the dead, with everything they owned; the earth closed over them, and they perished and were gone from the community. ³⁴ At their cries, all the Israelites around them fled, shouting, “The earth is going to swallow us too!”

³⁵ And fire came out from the LORD and consumed the 250 men who were offering the incense.

What was their sin?

- Complaining
- We take it lightly
- It's the air we breathe- it's become the acceptable sin
- God does not take it lightly

The very next day- the congregation again gathered against Moses and Aaron and they looked toward the tabernacle of the congregation and a cloud covered it and the glory of the Lord appeared

Moses urged Aaron to offer fire on the altar and put on incense to make atonement for the congregation

But a plague had already begun- 14,700 people died that day

Aaron made the offering and the plague was stayed.

In numbers 12-Miriam, Moses' sister is struck with leprosy for criticizing Moses' marriage choice. In his mercy, God cured her after a week.

The wilderness is very difficult

Sin makes it worse

God will not coddle your sin in the wilderness

We must remember that God is both holy and merciful-Satan will always try to compartmentalize these 2 aspects of God's character

1. God is all love and mercy-he won't judge us

“Then when it becomes clear to us there is a reckoning for sin Satan will immediately switch tactics and push in the other direction”

2. God is harsh and judgmental-there is no forgiveness

Puritan Thomas Manton puts it this way: (Ian Duiguid)

“Satan labors to represent God by halves,

- Only as a consuming fire clothed with justice and vengeance,
- Or only that the main of his name is his mercy and his goodness”

Be careful of your picture of God in the wilderness

In the wilderness our weakened state can make us susceptible to represent him in halves

Let's return to the 2 generations

- We just covered much of the sin of generation 1
- All of it stemmed from unbelief
- How will the second generation be different?
- How were they the same?

In many respects Numbers 20 was the end of the line for the 1st generation. It's bracketed by Miriam and Aaron's death.

The old generation is waning

A new generation on the horizon

What's New?

- A new victory
- Canaanites invade and God gives Israel the victory
- **They obeyed God's command for total destruction**
- There's still grumbling and God is still not taking their sin lightly
- He sends judgment on them by sending fiery serpents whose bite was fatal

Moses and the Bronze Serpent

- **Lest we forget that Numbers is NOT a boring book**
- We now come upon a very difficult passage to understand

- Culturally-we are at somewhat of a disadvantage in understanding Numbers 21

The Lord commands Moses to

- **Make a bronze serpent**
- **And attach it to a pole**
- **Hold the pole up**
- **Anyone who was bitten by the serpents' fatal bite could look upon the bronze serpent and live**

This passage is full of meaning-strange to us but would have spoken powerfully to those recently rescued from Egypt

Why snakes?

- They were a powerful symbol of Egyptian power
- Remember- God's people wanted to return to Egypt
- The serpent is also a symbol of the ultimate enemy of mankind-Satan
- The serpent lifted up by MOSES demonstrates in visible terms the defeat of Israel's mortal enemies Egypt and Satan
- By looking at the serpent by faith as commanded
- They were putting their trust in the Lord's power
- Any of Generation 2 who did not put their trust in the Lord's power would die in the wilderness also

Scripture Interprets Scripture- we interpret the Old Testament in light of the New

- **John 3:14-15 Referring to this incident**
- **Jesus says, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."**
- How thankful we are for Jesus' words here
- Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus –a Jew who would have known this story
- The bronze serpent points to a greater reality

- Jesus is pointing Nicodemus to this greater reality
- This is not a mere parable
- Duguid writes
- “For it was precisely on the cross that Christ won his victory over the ancient serpent, Satan himself, fulfilling the original Gospel promise of God
- “I will put enmity between you (serpent) and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring
- At the cross Jesus broke the serpent’s power
- Just as in the wilderness the serpent was transferred as a symbol of God’s power

Challenge

- **There are 2 ways to live –Psalm 1- way of wisdom or the way of foolishness**
- **There were 2 generations in the wilderness**
- **Gen 1 perished in the wilderness**
- **Gen 2 many saved from their sin by Faith in God’s victory in Christ (represented by the bronze serpent)**
- **We are all born Generation 1**
- **Through the Gospel we partake of life through faith like Generation 2**

So a new generation emerges from the wilderness

Something Old- The Covenant and the promises of God

Something New- The Promised Land

Something borrowed- Moses passes his leadership to Joshua through the laying of hands. Joshua’s authority was borrowed from Moses

Something Blue- bluish- purple-Royalty Moses prayed in Numbers 27 for the future leader of Israel, he was ultimately praying for a King- Joshua, David and others would join Israel’s history as prophets, priests and kings until King Jesus appears

But they all point to King Jesus

Are you seeing how the book of numbers not only gives an account of Israel's journey in the wilderness but also is a book about the Gospel-?

Let's make some clearer connections here

- **Many passages in numbers foreshadow Jesus's story**

Numbers 21:49

The bronze serpent held up foreshadows the crucifixion of Jesus

Numbers 11:35, 21:4-9

God provides water and manna for Israel in the wilderness

Jesus is the bread of life and living water for us as we trudge through the wilderness

Numbers 22:12, 23:29

God promises to bless his people- Foreshadows grace thru Jesus

Numbers 14:18

God is slow to anger and forgiving which foreshadows the grace of God in Jesus

Entire book of Numbers- gives an account of Israel's 30 year journey of sin cycles

New Testament-Demonstrated how we get trapped in cycles of sin that only Jesus can break

Numbers (And Exodus) show us God's abundant provision of water

Numbers 20:10-13

The Rock that brought forth water in the wilderness was Christ- all blessings flow from him

We are tied into Israel's story because of Christ- Listen to Paul's words

I Corinthians 10:1-6

- “For I don’t want you to be ignorant of this fact brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and they all passed thru the sea
- They all ate to same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink.
- For they all drank from the same spiritual drink; for they drank from that rock accompanied them and that rock was Christ
- Never the less, God was not pleased with most of them, and their bodies were scattered in the wilderness
- Now these things occurred to be an example to us

They drank the same spiritual drink –The rock that Moses struck in disobedience cost him entrance into the Promised land-because the rock was Christ.

The convergence of our story and Israel's is clear

How much water did God supply? More than we can comprehend-enough for 2 million people and their livestock.

How much Grace does God supply in Christ?

- **Philippians 4:19**-and God will meet ALL your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus
- **Ephesians 3:20**-Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask of or think, according to the power that works with in us
- **2 Corinthians 9:8** God is able to make all grace abound to you
- **Romans 15:13**- May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope
- **John 1:16**-For from HIS fullness we have all received grace upon grace

- **I Timothy 1:14-** and the grace of our LORD overflowed for me in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus
- **John 7:38-** Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, “Out of heart will flow rivers of living water.
- **ARE YOU THIRSTY-God doesn’t give you a thimble-he gives you rivers**
- **Jesus told Photina-Drink my water and you’ll never thirst again**
- **Romans 5:17-** for if because of one man’s trespasses, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ

DO you get the picture?

GOD IS NOT STINGY WITH YOU-even in the wilderness

DO you hear the fullness of blessings that are yours in Christ?

The Rock gushed in the Wilderness-Christ our Rock pours living water upon us,

The wilderness takes none of this away from us

Why do we live like were dead when God has lavished us?

Israel’s God in the wilderness is our God in the wilderness

The God of the Promised Land is the same God of the wilderness

If you choose to see it

- **Your wilderness** right now is a place of provision
- **It’s a place of abundance**
- **It’s a place of God’s provision**
- And we mentioned in session 1-
- The wilderness is a place of preparation
- It’s a place where God is forming you to take part in his mission

What is that Mission?

Let's go back to the Covenant

- Was a corporate document-not individual
- Made with a people
- Not a person
- God's purpose of the covenant

It outlines the stipulations of How we are to live before God in his world

It's MISSIONAL

I Peter 2: 9

Royal Priesthood

Holy Nation

A people for God's own procession

SO THAT.....

We are saved from something and we are saved for something

That we may proclaim the Excellencies of him who has called us out of darkness and into his marvelous light

A light to the nations

Blessed to be a blessing

We are saved from something and we are saved for something

The MISSIO DEI

Was once Israel's covenantal calling and now

It's the Church's Vocation

The Wilderness

- **Sanctifies you for the mission**
- Forms you to live by faith before a watching world
- The wilderness is for our sanctification
- But towards what end- The Glory and praise of our God and King and a light in the darkness to those who don't know him
- And we are to let our light shine before others in such a way that they give glory to God
- And entice others to follow
- Like in Deuteronomy 4:7-8
- May those around us ask- Who is your God ?

The wilderness is not a time to go rouge

- **We need each other**
- **We image God together as the body of Christ**
- **We need the church**
- **We need to remind each other**

Of God's provision and presence and our mission in the wilderness

Aaron and Hur held up Moses' arms in the battle with the Amalekites

We battle in the wilderness

Let's hold up each other's arms

Pray

PRAY

In session 1 & 2 we saw that Numbers is a book that points to the Gospel.

We are going to delve more deeply into this now as we look at the wilderness as it is pictured in the New Testament

Jesus is:

- The fulfillment of Israel's purpose and hope
- His story goes back the Genesis- The seed of the woman (Jesus) will bruise the serpent's head
- Jesus' story is part of the story of God's saving activity that goes back to Abraham and Sarah and the covenant God made with them
- Jesus didn't drop out of the sky in 1st C. Palestine with no provenance
- And Jesus' wilderness connects to Israel's wilderness

But let's back up- We will get to Jesus soon!

Opening shots in movies

- Important
- Shot chosen carefully by the director

Jurassic park-dock workers unloading the latest shipment of Dinosaurs for the park- we briefly see a velociraptor in a cage

- Immediately creates fear and danger

Lion King- this great, powerful piece of music

- Shows all the different animals coming together at Pride Rock to see the New Prince-Simba-We know this is a story about a king

Inglorious Bastards

- Brilliant Opening-arguably the director's best
- We see a farmer of a small farm
- He receives unexpected visitors
- A Nazi Colonel is interrogating the farmer
- About him possibly hiding Jewish fugitives on his farm
- Their conversation spans multiple languages
- The tension is palpable
- It builds with every passing second.

The New Testament Story of Jesus' ministry- starts with

John the Baptist

- He will set the stage for the story of a king
- And it's like nothing anyone expected
- Opening shot of John
- He's preaching
- REPENT- The kingdom of heaven has come near
- **But there must be some mistake**
- He's not on the busiest street corner in Rome
- He's in the wilderness-did God blow the opening shot?
- John the Baptist with one foot in the Old Covenant and one in the New
- Is a prophet-the last Old Testament
- And this King John speaks of is the last prophet
- John is wild and strange
- Not someone you'd pick for your press secretary for the Kingdom
- He's the forerunner of Israel's Messiah???
- John appears abruptly in Matthew's gospel
- We hear John proclaim boldly in the wilderness
"Prepare the way of the LORD-make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

But certain people have heard this before, where?

Isaiah 40:3

- Sometimes we blow by these words
- Lullaby effect
- “Prepare the way of the Lord” but many who heard understood and obeyed

We saw in session 1 how the wilderness was a place of God’s provision and presence

Doesn’t it make sense that the ultimate provision for God’s people would be heralded from the wilderness?

The upside down Kingdom once again.

It’s not what we’d think but the wilderness makes perfect sense in another way. John, like Jesus, was gathering the lost sheep of Israel. This was their mission and these lost sheep would have understood the wilderness setting.

Who is this forerunner announcing the kingdom?

- Someone who separates himself from elegant society
- He eats locusts and honey –these are the foods of a poor man
- He wears a camel hair robe and a leather belt
- John was not positioning himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy
- He was preparing the way
- He identifies the king with the wilderness- Where God spoke to
 1. Hagar
 2. Abraham
 3. Elijah
 4. Moses/Sinai
 5. And now John the Baptist

The wilderness was a common place for God to speak to his people

If we remember that the wilderness was a place of

- Testing
- Formation
- Transition
- Renewal

John's outpost makes perfect sense

- The wilderness is a liminal place where God prepares for the next chapter
- The word had become flesh
- The ultimate renewal was at hand

But couldn't God have chosen a more seemly forerunner?

If we saw John today:

- We'd think he was crazy
- Locust legs are sticking out of his teeth
- His hair is a rat's nest
- He'd never be hired by a fortune 500 Company
- Never be on the Cover of G.Q.
- He lives in the Judean wild country eating bugs

YET

- He's the culmination of the Old Testament prophets
- And Jesus called him "The greatest man ever born of a woman"-Luke 7:28
- And he thinks he's not worthy to even touch the messiah's sandal strap.
- NOT Elijah
- NOT the Christ

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness"

- Crying out from the harsh realities of the desert

- Giving hope
- Announcing the Kingdom

WHY THE WILDERNESS?

- Why not the synagogue
- Why not a street corner in Rome
- John beckons civilized sinners who are deceived by Satan's lies
- John is weather worn from the wilderness
- His words are like sandpaper-REPENT
- This grates on civilized hearts
- "Who does this indigent, ner' do well think he is?"
- He's telling them-It's not ok to keep living like you are living.
- Remember- this kind of confrontation eventually lost him his head
- He IS NOT preaching a Walt Disney version of the world.
- He's calling sinners to repent that they might escape from the wrath to come
- Wilderness is the PERFECT place
- In the wilderness of repentance, the pride of life is absent

Chad Bird states it this way:

"John calls you out into the wilderness, into the barren desert where the only life is where the water is. He's the water-man. John beckons you out of the civilization of sin into the wilderness of repentance, to lead you ultimately to the River of life. And, once he's got you there, standing in the oasis of the font, is your savor, Jesus Christ. John points and says "Behold, the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world."

"The wilderness of repentance is one wilderness we should never want to escape"

GH

In your wilderness today- Is there something you need to repent of?

Jesus in the Wilderness

After John's "Behold" proclamation and Jesus' Baptism

- We see Jesus
- Being led into the wilderness
- By the Spirit
- Why? To be tempted by the devil

NO Jewish tradition or prophecy that the messiah would be tempted by Satan

- Satan is trying to divert the obedient son of God from his path
- This is a cosmic conflict
- Between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world
- The conflict between Jesus and Satan should not be reduced to this one scene-but it is the clearest depiction of this conflict in scripture
- Satan knows he's defeated- but he continues to tempt Jesus-His pride makes him think he has a chance. He mocks Jesus
 1. During his ministry -Matthew 28
 2. At the crucifixion-mockers Matthew 27:27-30
 3. And he tempt Jesus in the wilderness is filled with mockery

LET'S Now

- focus in on Jesus' wilderness experience
- 40 days and 40 nights
 1. Reminiscent of Moses 40 years in the wilderness -Exodus 34:28
 2. 40 days without bread and water
 3. Jesus is bereft of human companionship
 4. The Spirit takes Jesus to the mountains of the West Bank over the city of Jericho
 5. Jesus is in the wilderness tired and famished and he remembers Deuteronomy 8:2

“Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way into the wilderness these 40 years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known-to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

The very words Jesus used against Satan – Obvious parallel here

Matthew’s audience would have understood this in a heartbeat.

- Israel failed her wilderness temptations
- Jesus-the true son of God, recapitulates Israel’s experience by remaining obedient to God, in the harshness of the wilderness
- Israel’s faith waned until it was restored by manna
- Jesus is hungry but remains faithful without a miracle

Let’s unpack Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness more

Notice that Satan takes Jesus to higher and higher places

Holy City

Pinnacle of the temple

High Mountain

Perhaps alluding to greater temptations as the story unfolds

Jesus’ Temptation

- The Holy Spirit leads him to the wilderness to be tempted
- This is a sticky point for some-we unapologetically affirm this

- The Spirit is free to lead us not only to good things but also into confrontations and situations where temptations occur
- Remember Moses' words in Deuteronomy 8:2- "Remember how the Lord your God led you these past 40 years, sending you hardships to test you?"
- Jesus was led by the spirit into the wilderness BUT the Devil did the tempting-important distinction

3 Temptations

1. "Turn these stones into bread"
2. "Throw yourself down"
3. "The Kingdoms of the world."

These were real temptations-not hypothetical

Jesus was hungry. Tired, thirsty, alone, physically weak

- He responds to each temptation by taking up the word of the Spirit

"Man shall not live on bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." PRESENT tense Matthew 4

- A picture of God in constant conversation with his world
- Matthew 4:4-Deuteronomy 8:3
- Jesus' wilderness experience is analogous to Israel's
- Deepest famine in the world today is a famine of the word of God
- Some of us have this food right in front of us and yet we're starving
- Jerome said. "If anyone is not feeding on the word of God, that person is not living."
- And to quote the prophetic Keith Green "How can you be so dead, when you've been so well feed"
- I digress
- Back to the story

Temptation 1

- We learn from Christ our prophet to find God's will in the midst of our wilderness temptations-we are to feed on him
- HOW??? His word
- We need to feed voraciously on the Scriptures for life and to resist temptations
- Are you depressed, anxious, unmotivated, giving into temptation, numbing your wilderness pain with alcohol, food, entertainment?
- Are you spending more time on your phone than in the word of God. Don't starve while eating dung when a banquet table has been set before you
- The biggest famine is not physical provisions-but a collective self-imposed famine of God's word- Matthew 4:4 "Man does not live on bread alone..."

Temptation 2

- "The Devil took Jesus into the holy city and placed him atop the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, 'If you really are the son of God, then throw yourself down from here' Because it is written "God will give his angels charge over you, on their hands they will bear you up lest you strike your foot on a stone"
- Satan thought Jesus was confused about his identity-"If you're the son of God."
- Second temptation –Filled with holy things
- Jesus taken to a holy city
- Placed atop a holy city
- Read the holy scriptures
- 1st temptation the Devil tried to cause Jesus to fall through his weak spot
- Physical weakness
- He was hungry, thirsty, tired
- 2nd temptation he tries to tempt Jesus through his strong spot-
- His faith and knowledge of God's word
- If Satan can't cause you to fall through your weaknesses
- He'll go after you through your strengths

- “Let him who thinks he stand take heed lest he fall” I Corinthians 10:12
- This is a type of spiritual Jiu-Jitsu
- It’s easiest to get where we’re weak
- Next easiest where we are strong

This temptation “Teaches us and the church that the devil is not only sensual but also spiritual..... The devil is not only at work in the wilderness but in the temple as well.”

Guard your steps as you approach the doors of the church- Ecclesiastes

You are not safe from temptation within the walls of your church

Jesus’ response

- Uses the scriptures accurately to show that Satan is perverting scripture by using it out of context- You shall not put the Lord your God to the test
- Calvin- “When we are tempted by a false use of scripture let us borrow weapons from the defense of our faith-from no other source than Scripture.”

Temptation 3

“Again the tempter takes Jesus aside to a very high mountain, and he shows him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, and he says to him “I will give all of this to you if you will just bow down and show me some worship. Then Jesus says to him ‘get out of here Satan! For it is written you shall worship the Lord your God alone and him only shall you serve.” Matthew 4:8-10

Satan leads Jesus higher and higher

- **Starts in the wilderness of the desert**
- **Top of temple**
- **Very high mountain**

SO after

Test 1-Physical life-Jesus weakest point

Test 2-Word of God-His strongest point

NOW ONE SPOT LEFT

- Jesus' Center point
- His vocation, his calling
- His love for the world
- Jesus is not like us though
- We are often tempted to make our work or, ministry or giftedness our god
- We sometimes think it's through our efforts that the Kingdom and glory of God advances
- We will do almost anything to keep from failing or looking like a failure in the eyes of others
- When we do this we've made the work of our hands our god
- The World's glory, the praise of man is very tempting

Satan's final enticement

- "Just give me one momentary bow"
- Just a single act
- The promise is breathtaking
- The whole world in the bargain
- Make no mistake
- Jesus felt the temptation-not hypothetical
- Jesus did love the world he created
- And people created in his image
- The deceiver whispers- "you love the world, I can give it to you"
- Satan offered Jesus the world-but it was his anyway
- So what was the temptation?

- What made this temptation so alluring is that Satan offered Jesus the kingdoms of the world without the cross
- Jesus didn't want to go to the cross-in Gethsemane we see him asking God for another way
- **But he responded to Satan**
- Get out of here now-not my will but the will of my father
- For it is written , Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only

Thank God for Jesus' faithfulness in the wilderness

The Wilderness is harsh and filled with temptation

Is was harsh for Israel

It was harsh for John

It was harsh for Jesus

It's harsh for us

- But there's one more Wilderness scene we need to look at in the New Testament

The Woman in the Wilderness

¹² A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. ²She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was

about to give birth. ³Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. ⁴Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. ⁵She gave birth to a son, a male child, who “will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.”^[a] And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. ⁶The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days

Revelation 12:1-17

- Who is this?
- The woman in Revelation 12 is Israel
- There is a progression here we need to see
- Israel gave birth to Jesus
- Jesus and the Spirit give birth to the church
- “A male child who would rule the nations with a rod of iron”
- Remember-John is giving an account of his vision to
- The church
- And what picture does John give of the Church in its liminal wilderness in Revelation 12:6
 1. She is nourished
 2. She is provided for
 3. Just like God provided and was present in Israel’s Wilderness-He has prepared a place in the wilderness for his church

- The wilderness is a place of hardship, persecution testing
- It’s a place where the church-the people of God will endure
- It’s a liminal space between Christ’s ascension and Parousia
- His provision and presence are always in the wilderness
- Take heart, Jesus has overcome the wilderness of this world.

- Today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, and in the day at Massah in the wilderness –Psalm 95:8
- As Israel's wilderness time was ending
- Moses would not enter the promised land
- Moses' final address to God's people in the wilderness
- He retells their story
- Reminds them of who God is
- Reiterates YHWH's instructions

Generation 2- imperfect people but people of faith

Zelophoned's daughters-that petition that they presented to Moses-He granted them their request, these women of faith- they would have their inheritance in the Promised Land

And those who receive Christ and trust him for their salvation will have their inheritance in the new creation that the Promised land pictures.

Picture your wilderness trials right now- I'll give you a minute

Now- picture the life you long for

The life you should long for is hidden in the life you have

Embrace your life in all its wilderness glory

Let's end with the beautiful Wilderness benediction from Numbers 6

"The Lord bless you and keep you

The Lord make his face to shine upon you

And be gracious unto you

The Lord lift up his countenance upon you

And give you peace.

Let's pray

God we echo the words of King David when he was in the wilderness of Judah

God you are my god, we earnestly seek you, our soul thirsts for you, our flesh faints , as in a dry and weary land where there is not water, we look upon you and behold your power and glory. Psalm 63

Father thank you that you sustain us in the wilderness. Thank you for your son, a light to the nations and the glory of your people Israel.

Give us strength and courage to look to you and trust you in the wilderness. Make this an encouragement to each other and a reflection of Christ to those in our midst. Amen

Numbers, God's Presence in the Wilderness, Ian Duguid

Bearing God's Name, Why Sinai Still Matters, Carmen Joy Imes

Walking with God in the Desert, Ray Vander Laan

Stories From the Wilderness, A Study of The Israelites 'Journey From Egypt to the Promised Land,
Erin H. Warren

The Crook In the Lot, God's Sovereignty and Wisdom Displayed in Our Afflictions, Thomas Boston

Bread in the Wilderness, Thomas Merton

From Wilderness to Glory, N.T.Wright

God, Where are you?! Finding Strength & Purpose in your Wilderness, John Bevere

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