

Israel in the Wilderness

- The generation of Israel that departed from Egypt with Moses and Aaron did not enter the promise land except for two individuals: Joshua and Caleb.

What was the reason that God allowed Israel to wander forty years in the wilderness until an entire generation had died off? This was the same generation who had experienced all of the miracles of God in Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the covenant at Sinai.

“Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for *their bodies* were scattered in the wilderness.

Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.” *1 Corinthians 10:1-11*

Wilderness attitudes of the people of Israel.

1. Complaining and murmuring

“Now *when* the people complained, it displeased the Lord; for the Lord heard *it*, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the Lord burned among them, and consumed *some* in the outskirts of the camp. Then the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the Lord, the fire was quenched” *Numbers 11:1-3*

2. Covetousness

- The people of Israel were not satisfied with what God had provided them, always wanting more, and better, and different:

“Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: “Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being *is* dried up; *there is* nothing at all except this manna *before* our eyes!” *Numbers 11:4-6*

- As slaves in Egypt, it is very unlikely the children of Israel would have eaten cucumbers, the melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. Their intense craving for something other than what God had provided made them place a higher worth on something they had likely never experienced.

- Complaining/coveting is also contagious: it started with the “mixed multitude” or “rabble” reminiscing about food in Egypt and then spread to all of the children of Israel.

“Now the manna *was* like coriander seed, and its color like the color of bdellium. The people went about and gathered *it*, ground *it* on millstones or beat *it* in the mortar, cooked *it* in pans, and made cakes of it; and its taste was like the taste of pastry prepared with oil. And when the dew fell on the camp in the night, the manna fell on it.” *Numbers 11:7-9*

- It was a wilderness, and if God had not provided the manna daily, they would have starved.

The Lord’s response to their coveting:

“So the Lord said to Moses: “you shall say to the people, ‘Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the hearing of the Lord, saying, “Who will give us meat to eat? For *it was* well with us in Egypt.” Therefore the Lord will give you meat, and you shall eat. You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but *for* a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have despised the Lord who is among you, and have wept before Him, saying, “Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?”” *Numbers 11:18-20*

Now a wind went out from the Lord, and it brought quail from the sea and left *them* fluttering near the camp, about a day’s journey on this side and about a day’s journey on the other side, all around the camp, and about two cubits above the surface of the ground. And the people stayed up all that day, all night, and all the next day, and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers); and they spread *them* out for themselves all around the camp. But while the meat *was* still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was aroused against the people, and the Lord struck the people with a very great plague. So he called the name of that place Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving.” *Numbers 11:31-35*

- God knows what is best for us, and coveting displeases God because it implies that what God has given us isn’t good enough for us, that He is not all-sufficient for us. But very frequently when we get the thing we desire intensely, it does not provide the satisfaction we thought it would, and instead it becomes “loathsome” to us.

•Instead: Contentment

“Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into *this* world, and *it is* certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” *1 Timothy 6:6-10*

3. A critical attitude

“Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman. So they said, “Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?” And the Lord heard *it*. (Now the man Moses *was* very humble, more than all men who *were* on the face of the earth)” *Numbers 12, 1-3*

- Miriam and Aaron criticized Moses not because of the woman he married but rather because of all the attention he got from the children of Israel because of his leadership role. Underlying the criticism was envy that the spotlight was on Moses and not on them.

The Lord’s response:

“Suddenly the Lord said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, “Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!” So the three came out. Then the Lord came down in the pillar of cloud and stood *in* the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both went forward. Then He said, “Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, *I*, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; He *is* faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings; and he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?” So the anger of the Lord was aroused against them, and He departed. And when the cloud departed from above the tabernacle, suddenly Miriam *became* leprous, as *white as* snow. Then Aaron turned toward Miriam, and there she was, a leper. So Aaron said to Moses, “Oh, my lord! Please do not lay *this* sin on us, in which we have done foolishly and in which we have sinned. **12** Please do not let her be as one dead, whose flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother’s womb!” So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, “Please heal her, O God, I pray!” Then the Lord said to Moses, “If her father had but spit in her face, would she not be shamed seven days? Let her be shut out of the camp seven days, and afterward she may be received *again*.” So Miriam was shut out of the camp seven days, and the people did not journey till Miriam was brought in *again*. *Numbers 12:4-15*

- A critical attitude displeases the Lord because selfish motives underlie that attitude and it does not seek the benefit of the one being criticized.

- Instead**, the Lord seeks an attitude of love in our horizontal relationships:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails” *1 Corinthians 13:4-8*

“Wives, likewise, *be* submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.” *1 Peter 3:1*

“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.” *Matthew 18 15-17*.

4. Doubting

“And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, **which I am giving to the children of Israel**; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them.” *Numbers 13:1-2*

“Now they departed and came back to Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the children of Israel in the Wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. Then they told him, and said: “We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this *is* its fruit. **Nevertheless** the people who dwell in the land *are* strong; the cities *are* fortified *and* very large; moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the South; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan.” *Numbers 13:26-29*

Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, “Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.”

But the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they *are* stronger than we.” And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, “The land through which we have gone as spies *is* a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it *are* men of *great* stature. There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.” *Numbers 13:26-33*

•Ten of the twelve spies doubted that they could conquer the land because of what they saw there. But the Lord had already stated “Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, **which I am giving to the children of Israel**,” so they doubted the Word of God. Furthermore, they had seen what God had done for them in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and Sinai. They knew that God was faithful to His promises by their own personal experience.

Doubting is also contagious:

“So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole

congregation said to them, “If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! Why has the Lord brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?” So they said to one another, “Let us select a leader and return to Egypt.”

Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.

But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, *who were* among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; and they spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying: “The land we passed through to spy out *is* an exceedingly good land. ***If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, ‘a land which flows with milk and honey.’*** Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they *are* our bread; ***their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them.***”

And all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Now the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of meeting before all the children of Israel.” *Numbers 14:1-10*

The Lord’s response to their doubt:

Then the Lord said to Moses: “How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them? I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they.”

Moses intercedes on behalf of the children of Israel.

“I have pardoned, according to your word; but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord— because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it. But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it. Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites dwell in the valley; tomorrow turn and move out into the wilderness by the Way of the Red Sea.”

And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, “How long *shall I bear with* this evil congregation who complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me. Say to them, ‘As I live,’ says the Lord, ‘just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you: The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above. Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would

make you dwell in. But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. But *as for* you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness. And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness. According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, *namely* forty years, and you shall know My rejection. I the Lord have spoken this. I will surely do so to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.” *Numbers 14 20-35*

•**Instead: Faith**, as expressed by both Joshua and Caleb

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”
Hebrews 11:1

•Faith involves the belief in the promises, character, and word of God, and ***acting*** upon that belief regardless of how one feels or whether the present situation (what we see) instills fear or doubt. That belief is also based on the evidence we have of God previously working in our lives.

•In our vertical relationship with God, faith is crucial:

“But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” *Hebrews 11:6*

“When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.” Then Jesus put out *His* hand and touched him, saying, “I am willing; be cleansed.” Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.” *Matthew 8:1-3*

“The centurion answered and said, “Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this *one*, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does *it*.” When Jesus heard *it*, He marveled, and said to those who followed, “Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” *Matthew 8:8-12*

“Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. Then His disciples came to *Him* and awoke Him, saying, “Lord, save us! We are perishing!” But He said to them, “Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?” Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm” *Matthew 8:23-26*

“And suddenly, a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years came from behind and touched the hem of His garment. For she said to herself, “If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well.” But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, “Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well.” And the woman was made well from that hour.” *Matthew 9:20-22*

“When Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, “Son of David, have mercy on us!” And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” They said to Him, “Yes, Lord.” Then He touched their eyes, saying, “According to your faith let it be to you.” And their eyes were opened” *Matthew 9:27-30*

“So He said, “Come.” And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind *was* boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, “Lord, save me!” And immediately Jesus stretched out *His* hand and caught him, and said to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” *Matthew 14:29-31*

“Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.” But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, “Send her away, for she cries out after us.” But He answered and said, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, “Lord, help me!” But He answered and said, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw *it* to the little dogs.” And she said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.” Then Jesus answered and said to her, “O woman, great *is* your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour” *Matthew 15:21-28*

“Then Jesus answered and said, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me.” And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?” So Jesus said to them, “Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.” *Matthew 17:17-21*

Wilderness Attitude	Kingdom-Focused Attitude
Complaining/Murmuring/Coveting	Contentment
Criticizing	Love
Doubting	Faith

Hebrews 11:

“By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, “and was not found, because God had taken him”; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

“By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God. By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born *as many* as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*, of whom it was said, “In Isaac your seed shall be called,” concluding that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, *leaning* on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw *he was* a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king’s command. By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in

Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry *land*, *whereas* the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days. By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.

And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also *of* David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again.

Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in* dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.”

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