

GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL

GOD DELIVERS

GOD THE REDEEMER

The Wilderness Test

1 Peter 4:12 (ESV) *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. As we consider the “testing” of the children of Israel as they journey through their “wilderness experience” let’s grow in strength for our own personal “wilderness journeys.”*

For the Israelites the wilderness was a literal place. For us, the wilderness is a picture of the world. Job said of his extreme loss and testing in **Job 23:10 (ESV)** *But he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.* David in his writings revealed that he actually sought after God’s testing. **Psalms 26:2 (ESV)** *Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and my mind.* We may shudder at the thought of Abraham’s test by God in the matter of being called to sacrifice his son, Isaac, However from Abraham’s obedience in his testing, he showed to the world that he was the father of faith. Shouldn’t it be the heart’s desire of every child of God to be known as a “person of faith?”

God’s Word tells us that testing is actually a “good thing.” **James 1:3-4 (ESV)** ³ *for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.* ⁴ *And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

When I think of a “wilderness” I picture a place like the national forest found in Arkansas. However, the wilderness of the Sinai Mountain range where the Israelites wandered was not a forest like we know. Its terrain would likely be closer to what we call a desert; however, there were some grassy areas and vegetation for grazing.

There are three recorded times in the Old Testament when the Israelites complained to Moses concerning the lack of water. We will look at two of those today. Moses was leading a large group of people toward the land of Canaan. **Numbers 2:32** records that Moses numbered over one-half million men not including the men of the tribe of Levi or any of the women and children. The availability of water would naturally be a cause for concern. In the New Testament, we have the promise of **Philippians 4:19 (ESV)** ¹⁹ *And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.* The Israelites would experience God supplying all their needs time after time during their wilderness testing.

The Israelites had just experienced God’s miraculous salvation of their lives at the crossing of the Red Sea. If you have walked with the LORD any length of time, chances are you already know that often after times of great joy, will come a time of great testing.

Read Exodus 15:22-26 (ESV) ²² *Then Moses made Israel set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water.* ²³ *When they came to Marah,*

they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah. ²⁴ And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, “What shall we drink?” ²⁵ And he cried to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the LORD made for them a statute and a rule, and there he tested them, ²⁶ saying, “If you will diligently listen to the voice of the LORD your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, your healer.”

In their present trouble, the Israelites quickly forgot being saved from death at the Red Sea. We may criticize them for grumbling and lack of faith; however, we must ask ourselves how often do we do the same thing?

Moses cried to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. The LORD providing a tree to sweeten the bitter water is one of the many times that He provided for the needs of His children in the wilderness. Here at the place of bitter waters the LORD revealed Himself as Yahweh-Rophe (the LORD Who Heals). The Healer of the waters promised to protect the people if they would obey Him.

At every test, the Israelites displayed an attitude of entitlement. Their continued complaints revealed that time after time they thought they deserved God’s goodness. Our lesson writers ask that we consider the question: “Do I believe I **deserve** God’s provision?” I will answer the question. God gives us what we least deserve. It is called grace. God withholds what we do deserve. It is called mercy. We talk a lot about justice. If God truly gave us justice, no one could stand. If we received what we deserve, we would all perish. Jesus Christ got what He did not deserve so we could receive what we do not deserve. God’s Word does say that life is fair.

Read Exodus 17:1-4 (ESV) ¹ *All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” And Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?” ³ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” ⁴ So Moses cried to the LORD, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.”*

Even when we are in the LORD’s will, troubles still come. The Israelites had followed the LORD’s commandment and they came to a place without water. Shouldn’t they have learned from previous experience that the LORD would provide? But then, we must ask ourselves, “does my own faith in times of trouble reveal that I have learned from past experiences? Do I live out my faith in my personal testing by trusting the LORD to provide for my needs?”

Some mistakenly believe that coming to Christ will solve all their needs. The “prosperity gospel” that is so prevalent today preaches this. The Israelites in the wilderness was claiming their own version of a prosperity gospel. We come to Christ for forgiveness of our sins and the gift of eternal life – not for what we can get. **2 Peter 3:18 (ESV)** ¹⁸ *But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.*

WHINERS ALWAYS FIND SOMEONE ELSE TO BLAME. *Therefore the people quarreled with Moses... Why quarrel with the leader that the LORD of heaven had given them? In all their experiences so far, Moses had proved to be a man of God. At Marah, Moses had beseeched the LORD and the LORD had provided the way for the bitter waters to be made sweet. Oh wait! This was different! This time the water was not bitter – the water just was not there! **Jeremiah 32:17 (ESV)**¹⁷ ‘Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.*

We still play the blame game today. Things don’t go as we think they should in church and we blame the preacher. Adults do wrong things and get caught and they blame their upbringing. We blame the government, we blame our boss. There is a time when each individual must “grow up” and take responsibility for their own actions.

It is in the heart of our Heavenly Father to give us good gifts; however, He also desires to find humble hearts in us. **1 Peter 5:6 (ESV)**⁶ *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.* In 40 years of walking with God, this generation never became humble people.

WHINERS DON’T HESITATE TO BRING UP THE PAST... *Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock... The past is glorified in the minds of whiners causing them to miss God’s goodness now and in the future.*

We need to remember that even when blessings do not come as we would like, God is providing something better for us. We read of some of the heroes of faith in **Hebrews 11:39-40 (ESV)**³⁹ *And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,⁴⁰ since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.*

WHINERS TRY GOD’S PATIENCE. *“Why do you test the LORD?”* Everything is all about the whiner and nothing about God and His glory. We may say that we believe that God is good but our whining reveals what is in our hearts.

Throughout Israel’s wilderness testing, we find the evidence time after time that the LORD was with them providing for their needs – even when they continued to whine and complain.

Read Exodus 17:5-7 (ESV)⁵ *And the LORD said to Moses, “Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go.⁶ Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.⁷ And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”*

In God’s providing water to the whiners, we see the wonderful patience and mercy of God towards sinners whose actions continually provoked Him. The correct response to our merciful God is found in **Psalms 118:29 (ESV)**²⁹ *Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!*

Biblical typology refers to special symbolism. A “type” in scripture is a person, place or thing in the Old Testament which foreshadows a person, place or thing in the New Testament. I normally refer to them as pictures. Some scholars say that a type in the Old Testament must be specifically identified in the New Testament scripture itself. For example, the Passover Lamb of Exodus is mentioned in *1 Corinthians 5:7 (ESV)*... *For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.*

GotQuestions.org states that there is a difference between an illustration and a type and uses the life of Joseph as an example. Many of us see ‘pictures’ in the life of Joseph that point to the life of Christ. However, GotQuestions.org believes that since the New Testament never uses Joseph as a model of Christ, Joseph’s story is properly called an illustration, and not a ‘type of Christ.’

As for me, this all gets a little more technical than I think is necessary. I just know that there are people, places and things in the Old Testament that point us to Jesus in the New Testament. I like to call them ‘pictures.’ However, our next passage does fit into the GotQuestions.org criteria as being ‘typology.’

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-6 (ESV) ¹ *For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. ⁶ Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.*

The Israelites were identified with Moses at their Red Sea “baptism” just as we are identified with Christ in our own baptism. God’s Presence dwelled with the Israelites in the form of a Cloud by Day and Pillar of Fire by Night. God’s Presence comes to dwell within us at the moment we accept Christ as Savior. Although we did not study it this time, when the Israelites had no physical food, God provided manna (bread from heaven) for them to eat. Jesus Himself is our Bread of Life. He satisfies our spiritual cravings.

When the Israelites were without water in the wilderness, the LORD said to Moses the deliverer: *you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.* Paul says: *the Rock was Christ.* We read Peter’s confession in **Matthew 16:15 (ESV)** ¹⁵ ... “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” Jesus said to Peter in **Matthew 16:18 (ESV)** ¹⁸ ... *on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* We can withstand any test when we stand firm in the Rock – our Rock is Jesus who gives us the Water of Life!