

OUT OF BONDAGE INTO ABUNDANCE

Part 5: Journey through the Wilderness

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INTRODUCTION

- A. After spending almost a full year encamped at Mt. Sinai, the Israelites finally began their journey to the Promised Land:
1. **Num. 10:11-13:** ¹¹*On the twentieth day of the second month of the second year, the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle of the covenant law.* ¹²*Then the Israelites set out from the Desert of Sinai and traveled from place to place until the cloud came to rest in the Desert of Paran.* ¹³*They set out, this first time, at the LORD's command through Moses.*
 2. NOTE: They had arrived at Mt. Sinai “in the third month after the Israelites left Egypt” (Ex. 19:1) and “the Tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month in the second year” (Ex. 40:17), almost a year after the institution of the Passover in Egypt
- B. However, what was an 11-day journey to the Promised Land (Deut. 1:2) would end up taking them 40 years! Why?
- C. There are a number of reasons why the Israelites spent 40 years in the wilderness before entering the Promised Land; we will examine **five important purposes** that God wanted to accomplish in their long wilderness journey:
1. To humble them
 2. To test them in order to know what was in their heart
 3. To teach them to live by the Word of God
 4. To discipline them
 5. To remove unbelief, rebellion & backsliding
- D. Most of these objectives are listed in a key passage that we will be examining in detail throughout this study:
- Deut. 8:2-5:** ²*Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, **to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart**, whether or not you would keep His commands.* ³*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 comes from the mouth of the LORD.** ⁴Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. ⁵Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so **the LORD your God disciplines you.**

I. GOD HUMBLING HIS PEOPLE

- A. **Deut. 8:2-5:** ²Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, **to humble and test you...** ³**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 comes from the mouth of the LORD.
- B. The Hebrew word translated “humbled” here is *anah* which conveys the meaning of “looking down on or browbeating; to depress literally or figuratively; to abase, afflict, chasten, deal hardly with, weaken”
- C. God knew the tendency of the human heart to become proud and boastful as success and prosperity increases, so He humbled the Israelites in order that “in the end it might go well with you” (after He blessed and multiplied them with great prosperity in the Promised Land)
- D. **Deut. 8:11-17:** ¹¹**Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe His commands, His laws and His decrees that I am giving you this day.** ¹²**Otherwise,** when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, ¹³**and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied,** ¹⁴**then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.** ¹⁵**He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock.** ¹⁶**He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you.** ¹⁷You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.”

- E. In the desert, God brought the people to a place of total dependence on Him – they had to look to Him for their daily bread, water and sustenance; this was carefully designed by God to break their self-sufficiency and prevent them from boasting and saying, “Look what I have done! I can take care of myself!”
- F. **For the New Testament believer**, God has designed the gospel of our salvation with such exquisite wisdom that it breaks all human pride and self-righteous boasting:
1. **Eph. 2:8-9:** *⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast.*
 2. **1 Cor. 1:26-31:** *²⁶Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But **God chose the foolish** things of the world to shame the wise; **God chose the weak** things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸**God chose the lowly** things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹so that no one may boast before Him. ³⁰It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹Therefore, as it is written: “**Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.**”*
 3. **1 Pet. 5:5-6:** *⁵In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.” ⁶**Humble yourselves**, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time.*
- G. God also engineers “wilderness” situations – thorns, troubles and hardships “far beyond our [human] ability to endure” – in order for us to learn to lean on and totally depend upon the Lord for everything:
1. **2 Cor. 1:8-9:** *⁸We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the **troubles** we experienced in the province of Asia. We were **under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure**, so that we despaired of life itself. ⁹Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of*

death. But **this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God**, who raises the dead.

2. **2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5-6** (NKJV): ¹⁶To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And **who is sufficient** for these things?...
⁵**Not that we are sufficient of ourselves** to think of anything as being from ourselves, but **our sufficiency is from God**, ⁶who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.
3. **2 Cor. 12:1-10** (NKJV): ¹It is doubtless **not profitable for me to boast**. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: ²I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. ³And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—⁴how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. ⁵Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities. ⁶For **though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool**; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me. ⁷And **lest I should be exalted above measure** by the abundance of the revelations, **a thorn in the flesh was given to me**, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, **lest I be exalted above measure**. ⁸Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. ⁹And He said to me, **“My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”** Therefore most gladly **I will rather boast in my infirmities**, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For **when I am weak, then I am strong**.
4. In Song of Solomon, there is a beautiful picture of the king’s bride coming out of the wilderness “leaning on her beloved”:

Songs 8:5: *Who is this coming up from the wilderness leaning on her beloved? Under the apple tree I roused you; there your mother conceived you, there she who was in labor gave you birth.*

II. GOD TESTED HIS PEOPLE

- A. **Deut. 8:2:** *Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and **test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep His commands.***
- B. The Hebrew word translated “test” here is *nasah* which means “to test, assay, prove, try;” assay is often used in the context of analyzing or testing a metal to determine its composition or purity
- C. The Hebrew word translated “to know” here is *yada* which literally means “to ascertain by seeing;” it conveys both the idea of knowing and also of making known, as seen in the following meanings: “to discern, discover, make known, perceive, show”
- D. God already “knew” what was in their heart (and He knows what is in ours as well!), but the purpose of tests and trials is reveal or make openly known what is in the heart
- E. “We are like tea bags – we discover our true flavor only when we are put in hot water!”
- F. God tested their obedience with simple instructions concerning the gathering of the manna, called the “bread or grain from heaven” or “angels’ food”:
 - 1. **Ex. 16:4-5:** *⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, “I will rain down **bread from heaven** for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way **I will test them and see whether they will follow My instructions.** ⁵On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.”*
 - 2. **Ex. 16:13-31:** *¹³That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a **layer of dew** around the camp. ¹⁴When the dew was gone, **thin flakes like frost on the ground** appeared on the desert floor. ¹⁵When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “**What is it?**” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat. ¹⁶This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Everyone is to gather as much as they need. Take an omer for each person you have in your*

tent.” ¹⁷The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. ¹⁸And when they measured it by the omer, the one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little. Everyone had gathered just as much as they needed. ¹⁹Then Moses said to them, **“No one is to keep any of it until morning.”** ²⁰**However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell.** So Moses was angry with them. ²¹Each morning everyone gathered as much as they needed, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away. ²²On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much—two omers for each person—and the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses. ²³He said to them, “This is what the LORD commanded: ‘Tomorrow is to be a day of Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.’” ²⁴So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. ²⁵“Eat it today,” Moses said, “because today is a Sabbath to the LORD. You will not find any of it on the ground today. ²⁶**Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any.**” ²⁷**Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none.** ²⁸**Then the LORD said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep My commands and My instructions?”** ²⁹Bear in mind that the LORD has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day He gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where they are on the seventh day; no one is to go out.” ³⁰So the people rested on the seventh day. ³¹The people of Israel called the bread manna. It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey.

3. **Ps. 78:23-25:** ²³Yet He gave a command to the skies above and opened the doors of the heavens; ²⁴He **rained down manna** for the people to eat, He gave them the **grain of heaven**. ²⁵Human beings ate the **bread of angels** [“angels’ food” – NKJV]; He sent them all the food they could eat.

G. On another occasion, a man was found gathering wood on the Sabbath and was stoned to death (Num. 15:32-36)

- H. After God spoke the Ten Commandments to the entire congregation of Israel, He tested them to see if they would listen to His voice:

Ex. 20:1, 18-21: ¹*And God spoke all these words* [Ten Commandments]... ¹⁸*When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they **trembled with fear**. They stayed at a distance ¹⁹and said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But **do not have God speak to us or we will die.**” ²⁰Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid. **God has come to test** [same word *nasah* – “prove” KJV] **you**, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.” ²¹**The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached** the thick darkness where God was.*

- I. Sadly, with each successive test, God made known what was in the hearts of the people: disobedience, rebellion, unwillingness, unbelief and fear!

- J. **For the New Testament believer**, God also tests or “proves” the genuineness of our faith:

1. **1 Pet. 1:6-7:** ⁶*In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in **all kinds of trials**. ⁷These have come so that the **proven genuineness of your faith**—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*
2. **1 Pet. 4:12:** *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you **to test you**, as though something strange were happening to you.*
3. **James 1:2-3, 12:** ²*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face **trials of many kinds**, ³because you know that the **testing of your faith produces perseverance**... ¹²Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having **stood the test**, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*
4. Paul advocated and practiced the “testing” of people in the church at times:
 - a) **2 Cor. 2:9:** *Another reason I wrote you was to see if you would **stand the test** and be obedient in everything.*

- b) **2 Cor. 8:7-8:** ⁷But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving. ⁸ I am not commanding you, but I want to **test the sincerity of your love** by comparing it with the earnestness of others.
- c) **2 Cor. 13:5-7:** ⁵Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you **fail the test**? ⁶And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test. ⁷Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong—not so that people will see that we have **stood the test** but so that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed.
- d) **1 Tim. 3:8-10:** ⁸In the same way, **deacons** are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁹They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰**They must first be tested**; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

III. GOD TAUGHT HIS PEOPLE

- A. **Deut. 8:2-4, 15-16:** ²Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years... ³**to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.** ⁴Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years... ¹⁵He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. **He brought you water out of hard rock.** ¹⁶**He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness**, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you. ¹⁷You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.”
- B. Through God’s miraculous and gracious provision of food, water, clothing and protection for 40 years in the wilderness, He was teaching the Israelites to trust in Him – He was graphically demonstrating His faithfulness and how He would never leave nor forsake them

- C. More importantly, God was teaching them that life depends upon more than physical food and clothing – He wanted them to understand that there is a spiritual life that depends on “every word that comes from the mouth of God”
- D. During His temptation in the wilderness, Jesus quoted this very Scripture to Satan:

Mat. 4:1-4: ¹Then Jesus was led by the Spirit **into the wilderness** to be tempted by the devil. ²After fasting forty days and forty nights, He was hungry. ³The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” ⁴Jesus answered, “It is written: **‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’**”

- E. **For the New Testament believer**, God graciously provides all earthly necessities, but the emphasis is always on seeking that which is spiritual, heavenly:

1. **Mat. 6:19-33:** ¹⁹Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also... ²⁴No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. ²⁵Therefore I tell you, **do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?** ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? ²⁸And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will He not much more clothe you— you of little faith? ³¹So do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we

wear?” ³²For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³But **seek first His kingdom** and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

2. **1 Cor. 15:19 (AMP):** *If we who are [abiding] in Christ have hope **only in this life** and that is all, then we are of all people most miserable and to be pitied.*
3. **Col. 3:1-2:** ¹Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

- F. Shortly after feeding the five thousand, Jesus spoke about another kind of bread:

John 6:26-35: ²⁶Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for Me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷**Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life**, which the Son of Man will give you. For on Him God the Father has placed His seal of approval...” ³⁰So they asked Him, “What sign then will You give that we may see it and believe You? What will You do?” ³¹Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” ³²Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is **not Moses** who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is **My Father who gives you the true bread from heaven**. ³³For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” ³⁴“Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.” ³⁵Then Jesus declared, “**I am the bread of life**. Whoever comes to Me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty.”

IV. GOD DISCIPLINED HIS PEOPLE

- A. **Deut. 8:2-5:** ²Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart... ⁵Know then in your heart that **as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you**.
- B. The Hebrew word translated “disciplines” here is *yasar* which means “to chastise, literally (with blows) or figuratively (with

words); hence to instruct, chasten, chastise, correct, instruct, punish, reform, reprove, teach”

C. As a loving Father, God corrected and trained His children; at times, this included punishment and chastening (and even death, as seen in *Section V.*), as illustrated in the following examples:

1. Miriam was smitten with leprosy after criticizing Moses (Num. 12)
2. After making the golden calf at Mt. Sinai, God was so angry He was ready to destroy Aaron, but he was spared only because of Moses’ intercession (**Deut. 9:16-20**):
*¹⁶When I looked, I saw that you had sinned against the LORD your God; you had made for yourselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf... ¹⁹I feared the anger and wrath of the LORD, for He was angry enough with you to destroy you. But again the LORD listened to me. ²⁰And **the LORD was angry enough with Aaron to destroy him**, but at that time I prayed for Aaron too.*
3. Moses was forbidden entrance into the Promised Land after the incident at Meribah, where he lost his temper with the Israelites and spoke rashly
Num. 20:2-13: *²Now 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! ⁴Why did you bring the LORD’s community into this wilderness, that we and our livestock should die here? ⁵Why 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!**” ⁶Moses 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. ⁷The 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.” ⁹So Moses took the staff from the LORD’s presence, just as He commanded him. ¹⁰He 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?” ¹¹Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank. ¹²But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, **“Because you did not trust in Me enough to honor Me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.”**

¹³These were the waters of Meribah, where the Israelites quarreled with the LORD and where He was proved holy among them.

4. **Ps. 106:32-33:** ³²By the waters of Meribah they angered the LORD, and **trouble came to Moses** because of them; ³³for they rebelled against the Spirit of God, and **rash words came from Moses’ lips.**

D. **For the New Testament believer,** God also disciplines us as a father disciplines his son:

1. **Heb. 12:5-11:** ⁵And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, ⁶because **the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and He chastens everyone He accepts as His son.**” ⁷Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as His children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? ⁸If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. ⁹Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! ¹⁰They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but **God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in His holiness.** ¹¹No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.
2. **Rev. 3:19:** Those whom I love **I rebuke and discipline.** So be earnest and repent.

V. GOD REMOVED UNBELIEF, REBELLION & BACKSLIDING

A. God destroyed the grumblers and complainers:

Num. 11:1-34: ¹Now the **people complained** about their hardships in the hearing of the LORD, and **when He heard them His anger was aroused. Then fire from the LORD burned among them and consumed some** of the outskirts of the camp. ²When the people cried out to Moses, he prayed to the LORD and the fire died down. ³So that place was called *Taberah*, because fire from the LORD had burned among them. ⁴The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, “If only we had meat to eat! ⁵We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. ⁶But now **we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!**” ⁷The manna was like coriander seed and looked like resin. ⁸The people went around gathering it, and then ground it in a hand mill or crushed it in a mortar. They cooked it in a pot or made it into loaves. And it tasted like something made with olive oil. ⁹When the dew settled on the camp at night, the manna also came down. ¹⁰Moses heard the people of every family wailing at the entrance to their tents. **The LORD became exceedingly angry**, and Moses was troubled. ¹¹He asked the LORD, “Why have You brought this trouble on Your servant? What have I done to displease You that You put the burden of all these people on me? ¹²Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do You tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land You promised on oath to their ancestors? ¹³Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, ‘Give us meat to eat!’... ¹⁴“Tell the people: ‘Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow, when you will eat meat. The LORD heard you when you wailed, “If only we had meat to eat! We were better off in Egypt!” Now **the LORD will give you meat**, and you will eat it. ¹⁵**You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five, ten or twenty days,** ¹⁶**but for a whole month—until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe it**—because you have rejected the LORD, who is among you, and have wailed before Him, saying, “Why did we ever leave Egypt?” ¹⁷But Moses said, “Here I am among six hundred thousand men on foot, and You say, ‘I will give them meat to eat for a whole month!’ ¹⁸Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for

them? Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them?" ²³The LORD answered Moses, "Is the LORD's arm too short? Now you will see whether or not what I say will come true for you." ²⁴So Moses went out and told the people what the LORD had said... ³¹Now a wind went out from the LORD and drove quail in from the sea. It scattered them up to two cubits deep all around the camp, as far as a day's walk in any direction. ³²All that day and night and all the next day the people went out and gathered quail. No one gathered less than ten homers. Then they spread them out all around the camp. ³³**But while the meat was still between their teeth and before it could be consumed, the anger of the LORD burned against the people, and He struck them with a severe plague.** ³⁴Therefore the place was named Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had craved other food.

Num. 21:4-9: ⁴They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the **people grew impatient on the way;** ⁵**they spoke against God and against Moses,** and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? **There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!**" ⁶**Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died.** ⁷The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸The LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." ⁹So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.

B. The spies' bring a bad report:

1. From the account in Numbers, it seems that the sending of 12 spies into the Promised Land was God's directive:

Num. 13:1-21: ¹The LORD said to Moses, ²**"Send some men to explore the land of Canaan,** which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders."³So at the LORD's command Moses sent them out from the Desert of Paran. All of them were leaders of the Israelites. ⁴These are their names: from the tribe of Reuben, Shammua... ⁵from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat...

⁶from the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh; ⁷from the tribe of Issachar, Igal... ⁸from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea son of Nun; ⁹from the tribe of Benjamin, Palti... ¹⁰from the tribe of Zebulun... ¹¹from the tribe of Manasseh... Gaddi... ¹²from the tribe of Dan, Ammiel... ¹³from the tribe of Asher, Sethur... ¹⁴from the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi... ¹⁵from the tribe of Gad, Geuel... ¹⁶These are the names of the men Moses sent to explore the land. (Moses gave Hoshea son of Nun the name Joshua.) ¹⁷When Moses sent them to explore Canaan, he said, “Go up through the Negev and on into the hill country. ¹⁸**See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many.** ¹⁹**What kind of land do they live in? Is it good or bad? What kind of towns do they live in? Are they unwalled or fortified?** ²⁰**How is the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees in it or not?** Do your best to bring back some of the fruit of the land.” (It was the season for the first ripe grapes.) ²¹So they went up and explored the land...

2. However, on closer examination, we find out that sending the spies in to explore Canaan was the people’s idea:

Deut. 1:19-24: ¹⁹Then, as the LORD our God commanded us, we set out from Horeb and went toward the hill country of the Amorites through all that vast and dreadful wilderness that you have seen, and so we reached Kadesh Barnea. ²⁰Then I said to you, “You have reached the hill country of the Amorites, which the LORD our God is giving us. ²¹**See, the LORD your God has given you the land. Go up and take possession of it** as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, told you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.” ²²**Then all of you came to me and said, “Let us send men ahead to spy out the land** for us and bring back a report about the route we are to take and the towns we will come to.” ²³**The idea seemed good to me;** so I selected twelve of you, one man from each tribe. ²⁴They left and went up into the hill country, and came to the Valley of Eshkol and explored it.

3. The spies came back with proof that Canaan was a good land flowing with milk and honey:

Num. 13:22-27: ²²They went up through the Negev and came to Hebron, where Ahiman, Sheshai and Talmai, the

descendants of Anak, lived...²³When they reached the Valley of Eshkol, they cut off a branch bearing a single cluster of grapes. Two of them carried it on a pole between them, along with some pomegranates and figs.²⁴That place was called the Valley of Eshkol because of the cluster of grapes the Israelites cut off there.²⁵At the end of forty days they returned from exploring the land.²⁶They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land.²⁷They gave Moses this account: **“We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit.”**

4. But the spies spread a bad report about the good land, poisoning the people with their spirit of unbelief:

Num. 13:28-33: ²⁸**“But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there.** ²⁹*The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan.”* ³⁰Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, “We should go up and take possession of the land, for **WE CAN** certainly do it.” ³¹But the men who had gone up with him said, **“WE CAN’T** attack those people; they are stronger than we are.” ³²**And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored.** They said, “The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size.” ³³We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”

5. The people’s hearts melted with fear; they rebelled and were unwilling to go up to the Promised Land:

Deut. 1:25-36: ²⁵Taking with them some of the fruit of the land, they brought it down to us and reported, “It is a good land that the LORD our God is giving us.” ²⁶**But you were unwilling to go up; you rebelled** against the command of the LORD your God. ²⁷You grumbled in your tents and said, “The LORD hates us; so He brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us.

²⁸Where can we go? Our brothers have made our hearts melt in fear. They say, ‘The people are stronger and taller than we are; the cities are large, with walls up to the sky. We even saw the Anakites there.’” ²⁹Then I said to you, “Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them. ³⁰The LORD your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as He did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes, ³¹and in the wilderness. There you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place.” ³²In spite of this, you did not trust in the LORD your God, ³³who went ahead of you on your journey, in fire by night and in a cloud by day, to search out places for you to camp and to show you the way you should go. ³⁴When the LORD heard what you said, He was angry and solemnly swore: ³⁵“No one from this evil generation shall see the good land I swore to give your ancestors, ³⁶except Caleb son of Jephunneh. He will see it, and I will give him and his descendants the land he set his feet on, because he followed the LORD wholeheartedly.”

6. There were a number of things the Israelites wanted to find out through the spies, but this was actually done in unbelief, because God had *already* told them *everything* they needed to know about the Promised Land:

- a) **Their questions:** “What is the land like? Is it good or bad? Is the soil fertile or poor? Are there trees in it or not?”

God’s answers: “A good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex. 3:8); “A land with... vineyards and olive groves you did not plant” (Deut. 6:11); “A good land—a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills” (Deut. 8:7-9); “A land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven” (Deut. 11:11)

- b) **Their questions:** “What kind of towns are there? Are they unwallled or fortified?”

God's answers: "A land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant" (Deut. 6:10-11);

- c) **Their questions:** "What are the people who live there like – are they strong or weak, few or many?"

God's answers: "A good and spacious land—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites (Ex. 3:8); "My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out (Ex. 23:23);

7. The results of this "spy mission" were disastrous; the entire Israelite community became discouraged, grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and wanted to go back to Egypt:

Num. 14:1-4: *¹That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. ²All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! ³Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" ⁴And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt."*

8. Joshua and Caleb were the only spies who believed and spoke a positive message of faith, trying to encourage their fellow Israelites:

Num. 14:5-10: *⁵Then Moses and Aaron fell facedown in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there.*

⁶Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes ⁷and said to the entire Israelite assembly, "The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good.

⁸If the LORD is pleased with us, He will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. ⁹Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us.

Do not be afraid of them.” ¹⁰But the whole assembly talked about stoning them...

9. Moses' intercession spared the people from God's boiling anger:

Num. 14:10-20: ¹⁰*Then the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting to all the Israelites. ¹¹The LORD said to Moses, “How long will these people treat Me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in Me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them? ¹²**I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them**, but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they.” ¹³Moses said to the LORD, “Then the Egyptians will hear about it! By Your power You brought these people up from among them. ¹⁴And they will tell the inhabitants of this land about it. They have already heard that You, LORD, are with these people and that You, LORD, have been seen face to face, that Your cloud stays over them, and that You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. ¹⁵If You put all these people to death, leaving none alive, the nations who have heard this report about You will say, ¹⁶‘The LORD was not able to bring these people into the land He promised them on oath, so He slaughtered them in the wilderness.’ ¹⁷“Now may the Lord's strength be displayed, just as You have declared: ¹⁸‘The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished; He punishes the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.’ ¹⁹In accordance with Your great love, **forgive the sin of these people**, just as You have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now.” ²⁰**The LORD replied, “I have forgiven them, as you asked.”***

10. However, God decreed that all of the rebellious, unbelieving generation 20 years and older (except for Joshua and Caleb) would never see the Promised Land – they would die in the wilderness:

Num. 14:20-30: ²¹*Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth, ²²**not one of those who saw My glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness but who disobeyed Me and tested Me ten times— ²³not one of them will ever see the***

land I promised on oath to their ancestors. No one who has treated Me with contempt will ever see it. ²⁴But because My servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows Me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it. ²⁵Since the Amalekites and the Canaanites are living in the valleys, turn back tomorrow and set out toward the desert along the route to the Red Sea.” ²⁶The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: ²⁷“How long will this wicked community grumble against Me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. ²⁸So tell them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very thing I heard you say: ²⁹**In this wilderness your bodies will fall—every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against Me.** ³⁰Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.

11. Forty years for forty days (**Num. 14:31-39**): ³¹As for **your children** that you said would be taken as plunder, **I will bring them in to enjoy the land you have rejected.** ³²But as for you, your bodies will fall in this wilderness. ³³Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the wilderness. ³⁴**For forty years—one year for each of the forty days you explored the land—you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have Me against you.** ³⁵I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will surely do these things to this whole wicked community, which has banded together against Me. They will meet their end in this wilderness; here they will die.” ³⁶So the men Moses had sent to explore the land, who returned and made the whole community grumble against him by spreading a bad report about it—³⁷**these men who were responsible for spreading the bad report about the land were struck down and died of a plague before the LORD.** ³⁸Of the men who went to explore the land, only Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh survived. ³⁹When Moses reported this to all the Israelites, they mourned bitterly..

C. Korah's rebellion and the aftermath:

Num. 16:1-3, 32-49: ¹**Korah** son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and certain Reubenites—**Dathan and Abiram**, sons of Eliab, and **On** son of Peleth—**became insolent** ²**and rose up against Moses. With them were 250 Israelite men**, well-known community leaders who had been appointed members of the council. ³They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, “You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the LORD's assembly?...” ²⁸Then 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: ²⁹If these men die a natural death and suffer the fate of all mankind, then the LORD has not sent me. ³⁰But 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.**” ³¹As soon as he finished saying all this, the ground under them split apart. ³²**The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households, and all those associated with Korah**, together with their possessions. ³³They 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. ³⁴At their cries, all the Israelites around them fled, shouting, “The earth is going to swallow us too!” ³⁵And **fire came out from the LORD and consumed the 250 men** who were offering the incense... ⁴¹**The next day the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron.** “You have killed the LORD's people,” they said. ⁴²But when the assembly gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron and turned toward the tent of meeting, suddenly the cloud covered it and the glory of the LORD appeared. ⁴³Then Moses and Aaron went to the front of the tent of meeting, ⁴⁴and the LORD said to Moses, ⁴⁵**“Get away from this assembly so I can put an end to them at once.”** And they fell facedown. ⁴⁶Then Moses said to Aaron, “Take your censer and put incense in it, along with burning coals from the altar, and hurry to the assembly to make atonement for them. Wrath has come out from the LORD; the plague has started.” ⁴⁷So Aaron did as Moses said, and ran into the midst of the assembly. The plague had already started

among the people, but Aaron offered the incense and made atonement for them. ⁴⁸He stood between the living and the dead, and the plague stopped. ⁴⁹But **14,700 people died from the plague**, in addition to those who had died because of Korah.

D. **For the New Testament believer**, the severe chastisements that befell the rebellious Israelites should serve as sober warnings and examples for us all:

1. **1 Cor. 10:1-11:** ¹For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. ²They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³They all ate the same spiritual food ⁴and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. ⁵Nevertheless, **God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.** ⁶**Now these things occurred as examples** to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. ⁷Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: “The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry.” ⁸We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day **twenty-three thousand of them died.** ⁹We should not test the Lord, as some of them did—and were **killed by snakes.** ¹⁰And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were **killed by the destroying angel.** ¹¹**These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings FOR US, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.**
2. **Heb. 10:26-31:** ²⁶If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, ²⁷but only a **fearful expectation of judgment** and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. ²⁸Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹**How much more severely** do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? ³⁰For we know Him who said, “It is Mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge His

people.” ³¹*It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

3. **Rom. 11:17-22:** ¹⁷*If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, ¹⁸do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. ¹⁹You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.” ²⁰Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. **Do not be arrogant, but tremble.** ²¹For if God did not spare the natural branches, **He will not spare you either.** ²²*Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in His kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.**

VI. CONCLUSION

- A. There are many parallels between Israel’s experience in the wilderness and the day-to-day life of a Christian
- B. For the follower of Christ, God uses trials, humblings, deserts, discipline and chastenings to teach total dependence on God and His word, and to refine and purify our faith so that it is genuine.
- C. Just as Israel’s disobedience and unbelief prevented them from entering into God’s promised rest, we must now be careful to walk by faith in God’s promises and obey His every command if we are to enter that rest:

Heb. 3:18-19: ¹⁸*And to whom did God swear that they would never enter His rest if not to **those who disobeyed?** ¹⁹So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their **unbelief.***

Heb. 4:1-11: ¹*Therefore, since **the promise of entering His rest still stands,** let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. ²For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.*

³*Now **we who have believed enter that rest,** just as God has said, “So I declared on oath in My anger, ‘They shall never enter My rest.’” And yet His work has been finished since the creation of*

the world. ⁴For somewhere He has spoken about the seventh day in these words: “And on the seventh day God rested from all His work.” ⁵And again in the passage above He says, “They shall never enter My rest.” ⁶It still remains that some will enter that rest, and **those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience.** ⁷Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later He spoke through David, as was said before: “Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.” ⁸For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. ⁹**There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God;** ¹⁰for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from His. ¹¹Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

- D. **Acts 13:17-19:** ¹⁷The God of the people of Israel chose our ancestors; He made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt; with mighty power He led them out of that country; ¹⁸for about forty years **He endured their conduct in the wilderness;** ¹⁹and **He overthrew seven nations in Canaan,** giving their land to His people as their inheritance.
- E. In our next study (Part 6), we will take a closer look at those “seven nations in Canaan” that Israel had to conquer and overcome.