

# IN BETWEEN | Face the Storm

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August 30, 2020

## Recap

Last week we began a two-week series called “In Between,” looking at a portion of the Old Testament story of the Israelites during their wilderness wanderings. God had led them out of slavery in Egypt, and is bringing them toward the Promised Land. But there was a 40-year period where they were “in between.” Some million Israelites, without a home, wandering through a barren desert. *They’re not where they used to be — and they weren’t yet where they were going to be.*

Last week, we looked at the fact that Moses brought his crisis to God. God in His mercy, and gentleness, and generosity multiplied Moses’ leadership. Instead of one carrying the responsibility, there were now 70 additional leaders with Moses, and an enormous weight was lifted from him.

## Today

**But what we left unaddressed and undealt with were the Manna riots! God had yet to deal with them.**

### Numbers 11:18-23

And 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 better for us in Egypt.” Therefore the Lord will give you meat, and you shall eat. 19 You shall not eat just one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, 20 but a whole month, until it comes out at your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have rejected the Lord who is among you and have wept before him, saying, “Why did we come out of Egypt?”’ ” 21 But Moses said, “The people among whom I am number six hundred thousand on foot, and you have said, ‘I will give them meat, that they may eat a whole month!’ 22 Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, and be enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, and be enough for them?” 23 And the Lord said to Moses, ***“Is the Lord’s hand shortened?”***

What happens directly after this is God shows his power by sending anywhere from 40-60 lbs. of quail for each person. Some of the people just started gorging themselves — and the scripture says that while the meat was still between their teeth, they were hit with a plague, and many of them died.

## THE PUNISHMENT OF SIN THE PURPOSE OF THE WILDERNESS THE PLACE OF PROMISE

## THE PUNISHMENT OF SIN

When you read this passage, it almost feels like that... it almost seems vengeful.

- *“Oh You want meat!? I’ll give you meat alright, and you’re gonna eat it!”*

**ILLUSTRATION** — this reminds of the dad who catches his little boy smoking a cigarette, and as punishment makes him smoke the whole pack in one sitting. Agree with the methodology or not, it’s probably effective. That kid is never going to forget how green and sick he was afterward.

Last week we talked about God inviting us to relate to Him as a loving Father... well, there’s an aspect of Fatherhood that we don’t like very much.

**When you understand the nature of sin —  
you understand the purpose of punishment.**

“Sin is the suicidal action of the human will against itself.”<sup>1</sup>  
– W.G.T. Shedd, 19<sup>th</sup> Century Theologian

**In other words, sin is an act that is in direct violation of your own best interest,** and it directly weakens your will toward a particular action or sin. It makes it that much more difficult to resist that next time.

- It’s why addictions are so hard to break
- It’s why self-destructive habits and thought patterns are so difficult to change
- It’s exactly why God deals with the Israelites the way he does

God isn’t being vengeful at all in this passage — in fact what He’s doing is the most loving thing He could possibly do for them.

***Because their issue — it’s not about hunger, it’s about the heart.***

Look at how God reiterates they’re complaining, **“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 better for us in Egypt.”**

- What they’re saying is that **“They no longer want God to save them from Egypt, but they want Egypt to save them from God.”**
- *God says, “Okay, you want meat? Here you go.” And it says that those with the craving and ate died of a plague and were buried there.*

**Be careful what you demand from God, because He might just give it to you.**

- Sin is often its own punishment... it brings its own destruction. They demanded, God gave, and they reaped the consequences of their own sin and self-indulgence.

Moses tells the Israelites in...

**Deuteronomy 8:5**

Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you.

**Discipline done rightly is about short-term suffering for the long-term good.  
It’s inflicting momentary pain for a redemptive purpose.**

**Hebrews 12:11**

For the moment **all discipline** seems **painful** rather than **pleasant**, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

- The inverse of this passage is a perfect description of sin...
- *“For the moment, all sin seems pleasant rather than painful, but later it yields rotten fruit in those who are given to it.*

*God is a Loving Father. He’s a perfect parent, and he is working to purge us of selfishness and sin. He brings discipline into your life, why? Because he loves you. Because He’s for you. God’s discipline is never pleasant, but if we’ll submit to it, it always brings about a long-term good.*

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<sup>1</sup> Shedd, W.G.T. *Sermons to the Natural Man* (C. Scribner & Company, 2007) 203

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## THE PURPOSE OF THE WILDERNESS

One of the most common questions about the wilderness wanderings is why 40 years? If you look at a map of their journey — they could have literally walked in a straight line from Egypt to Canaan. But instead they wandered in circles for 40 years.

In this passage, Moses gives us a glimpse into something that has a much broader application for us and for the people of Israel. God spread his spirit out on the 70, and then places His spirit on two men, Eldad and Medad, who didn't join Moses in the tent of meeting. They start prophesying in the camp, which historically had been a role reserved for Moses alone.

### **Numbers 11:27-29**

27 And a young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” 28 And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, “My lord Moses, stop them.” 29 But Moses said to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!”

***Do you hear what Moses is saying?** “You're jealous for me Joshua, but it's not about me. I LOVE that those men are prophesying in the camp! I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and were empowered by God's Spirit in this way! Moses doesn't say, “You're right! We need to stop them. I'm the only one allowed to do that. We need more leadership, not less. We need more people empowered by God's Spirit, operating in their gifting, not less.”*

**Moses is not threatened by other people's success.** He's not looking for personal privilege. What's revealed in Moses in this moment is his **self-giving, other-affirming, humility. It's a beautiful picture of what healthy leadership looks like.**

*And see, Moses' response here gives us a glimpse into the purpose of the Exodus...*

### **Deuteronomy 8:2**

“Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, **to humble you and to test you** in order to **know what was in your heart ...**”

In other words, Moses looks back as they're about to cross the Jordan and says, “*The reason you went through the wilderness was because you were self-reliant, and self-deceived. You didn't know what was in your own heart. You didn't know who you were.*” It was education. It was counseling. It was training. It was humbling. That's the reason Moses says, “The reason why you didn't immediately go to Canaan is because, even though you were out of slavery, slavery wasn't out of you.”

***The purpose of God in the wilderness was not transportation — but transformation.***

It's God saying, “*The wilderness, in the “in between” I'm working to purge you of your self-defeating, self-serving, self-justifying efforts — and the only way that's possible is through a long, arduous, slow, painful, frustrating journey through a barren desert.*”

God's telling them, “*I'm going to make you a great nation one day! And you're going to have economic power, military strength, you're going to have resources that you can't even imagine right now, you're going to be great!*”

**But if you don't learn to trust me now without those things, you'll never trust me then.**

***The choices you make in scarcity reveal who you'll be in abundance.***

**It's God saying—  
if you're faithful with little,  
you'll be trusted with much.**

*And there are choices that need to be made in the wilderness  
that are going to determine who you are when you come out on the other side.*

**And if you look across the landscape of our Old Testament heroes... every single one of them had their faith stretched and tested at almost every point.** Around every corner was hardship, difficulty, suffering, some version of a barren desert.

And what God is showing us in all of this is that...

- **Your TRUST will never grow unless it's TESTED.**
- **Your COMMITMENT will never grow, unless it's TEMPTED.**
- **Your PATIENCE will never grow unless it's STRETCHED**
- **Your COURAGE will never grow unless it's CHALLENGED.**

**The harsh reality of the “in between” is  
it's either going to grow your faith or kill it —  
but you get to choose which one.**

- Moses poured his heart out to God.
- The Israelites complained against God.
- God's response to both was completely different.

***How are you responding in the wilderness? In the “in between”?***

***What decisions do you need to make today in the “in between” that will determine who you are on the other side?***

*When you're in the middle of the struggle, look inward and ask...*

*“What is this circumstance bringing up in me and why?”*

*“What is this revealing about my character that God wants to work on?”*

*“What habits and areas of my life need to change?”*

*“I realize this suffering is bringing out my weaknesses, there's my cowardice, my fear, my pride, there's an idol in my life.”*

**God, help me!**

What are you inviting me to stop doing?

What are you inviting me to start doing?

What habit do you want to change or adjust in my life?

What character weakness are you working on right now?

How do I trust you in that?

**If we don't trust him in scarcity,  
we'll never trust Him with abundance.**

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## **THE PLACE OF PROMISE**

*One thing I love about the scriptures, is where the New Testament gives us principles, the Old Testament gives us pictures. One of the most beautiful pictures in the entire Bible is the Israelites journey into the promised land. This is what Moses tells the Israelites before they cross over.*

## Deuteronomy 8:1-10

...go in and possess the land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers. **2** And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. **3** And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. **4** Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. **5** Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you. **6** So you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him. **7** For the Lord your God is bringing you into **a good land**, a land of **brooks of water**, of **fountains and springs**, flowing out in the valleys and hills, **8** a land of **wheat and barley**, of **vines and fig trees and pomegranates**, a land of **olive trees and honey**, **9** a land in which you will eat **bread without scarcity**, in which **you will lack nothing**, a land whose **stones are iron**, and out of whose hills you can dig **copper**. **10** And you shall **eat and be full**, and you shall **bless the Lord your God for the good land he has given you**.

Imagine, hearing that after wandering in a barren desert for 40 years! Look at the goodness of God... look at what He's provided for us. Look at the provision, the love, the outrageous generosity, His abundant blessing! All those years of wandering... our complaining, of grumbling, of faithlessness, and this is what God had in store for us the whole time!

*Imagine the realization. It's finally dawning on them that they're about to be able to rest. To truly rest. To enjoy what God had prepared for them. To enter into the land, and just enjoy the blessings of God.*

*J. Alec Motyer, in a conversation with R.C Sproul draws out this connection between the Old and New Testament...*

“Think about it. Think of what an Israelite would say on the way to Canaan, having come out of the Red Sea. Here's what an Israelite would say: If you said, 'Who are you?' they would say, 'I was in a foreign land under the sentence of death, in bondage, but I took shelter under the blood of the lamb. Our mediator broke us out, and we crossed over, and now we're on our way to the Promised Land. We're not there yet, but he's given us his law to make us a community. And he's given us the Tabernacle to live by grace and forgiveness. And his presence is in our midst, and he's going to stay with us until we get home.' That's exactly what the Christian says.”<sup>2</sup>

~ J. A. Motyer

Is that your hope? Is that what you've got your eyes on? That one day, we will enter the land flowing with Milk and Honey... a good land, flowing with water, fountains, and springs... a land of peace, of blessing, of prosperity? A land in which you will lack nothing, where we will eat and be full. A land in which our God will reside with us, where He will be our light, our life. And we will bless Him, and forever live under the riches of His eternal blessing?

**We're not there yet.**

***But He's going to stay with us until we get home.***

**And He'll remain with us forever.**

***Are you holding on to that?***

***Don't ever lose sight of it.***

***Don't forget what God has prepared for those who love Him.***

***Don't ever miss the beauty of God's gentle and faithful provision in the wilderness, in the darkest valleys, in the in between...***

Puritan writer John Owen, said when you're sailing and the storm comes, you better get the wheel and hold steady, stand firm, and hold the rudder. If you do that, when the storm is through you will have moved toward your destination much, much faster. But if you bail, go beneath deck, and you hide, and let the wheel go wherever the wind blows it, not only will you not reach your destination, but you'll potentially drown in the storm.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Motyer, J.A., *The Message of Exodus* (InterVarsity Press, 2015)

<sup>3</sup> Owen, John. *Works of John Owen* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1991)

When the storm comes — when you're in the wilderness — when you're in the "in between" **it will either make you far better, or far worse.**

But what determines the outcome is up to you —

Your willingness to endure, to face the storm,

to lean into discomfort, and God's discipline,

to face down what you're most afraid of,

to allow God to stretch you, to humble you, to grow you,

to learn to abide deeply in God, and trust in whatever it is He wants to do in you.

***What gave Jesus the power to endure His suffering? The joy set before him.***

**Our eternal dwelling place with God in the land of abundance —  
that's our joy.**

**That's our place of promise.**

**Keep your eyes on that. Face the storm. And hold on tight.**

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## **Discussion Questions**

1. What was God's purpose in sending so much quail, so that it would become loathsome to them?
2. Discuss: "When you understand the nature of sin, you understand the purpose of punishment."
3. Read **Deuteronomy 8:2**. Why did God lead the Israelites in the wilderness for forty years?
4. Are you in the middle of a struggle? What is this circumstance bringing up in you and why? What is it revealing about your character that God wants to work on?
5. Discuss: "The harsh reality of the 'in between' is it's either going to grow your faith or kill it — but you get to choose which one." How are you responding?
6. What gave Jesus the power to endure His suffering?
7. What is our joy?

# NOTES