

Moses And Israel In The Wilderness

(appropriate for Mid Schoolers and older)

Michael R. Daily, December 2021

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What would you say if I told you of a people who always knew exactly what God wanted them to do because God always gave them extremely clear signs, were supernaturally blessed by God such that they never had to work but always had plenty of food, their clothes and shoes were always new, and they were at peace with all the people around them? What would you think about these people's relationship with God?

What if I told you of another people who knew God's will but rarely received unmistakable signs, had to work to provide food and clothing for their families, had belongings that wore out and had to be replaced, and were constantly in conflict with the people around them? What would you think about these people's relationship with God?

Tonight we will look at this question during the time of Moses.

When Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt they travelled through the wilderness until they came to the edge of the Promised Land at a place called Kadesh-barnea (also referred to as Meribah or Massah).

Note: Meribah and Kadesh-barnea are co-located. Meribah is the name of the local spring which is also referred to as Massah.

(Numbers 27:14)

for in the wilderness of Zin, during the strife of the congregation, you rebelled against My command to treat Me as holy before their eyes at the water." (These are the waters of Meribah of Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin.)

(Deuteronomy 33:8)

Of Levi he said, "*Let Your Thummim and Your Urim belong to Your godly man, Whom You proved at Massah, With whom You contended at the waters of Meribah;*

During their travels through the wilderness God was leading them using a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. When the pillar moved, the nation of Israel would move also, following the pillar. God's will was extremely clear to them. They never had to worry about what God wanted them to do.

Exodus 13:21-22

The LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. ²² He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.

Also, as Israel left Egypt, the most wealthy country on earth at the time, the Egyptians gave all of their silver and gold and nice clothes to them making the people of Israel rich.

Exodus 12:35-36

Now the sons of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, for they had requested from the Egyptians articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; ³⁶ and the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have their request. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

According to Deuteronomy 2:13-14 it took Israel about two years to travel through the wilderness until they came to Kadesh-barnea.

(Deuteronomy 2:13-14)

'Now arise and cross over the brook Zered yourselves.' So we crossed over the brook Zered. 14"Now the time that it took for us to come from Kadesh-barnea until we crossed over the brook Zered was thirty-eight years, until all the generation of the men of war perished from within the camp, as the LORD had sworn to them.

Once they were at the edge of the Promised Land twelve spies were sent to spy out the land. Ten gave a bad report that the land could not be taken.

Deuteronomy 1:19-22, 32-40

"Then we set out from Horeb, and went through all that great and terrible wilderness which you saw on the way to the hill country of the Amorites, just as the LORD our God had commanded us; and we came to Kadesh-barnea. 20" I said to you, 'You have come to the hill country of the Amorites which the LORD our God is about to give us. 21' See, the LORD your God has placed the land before you; go up, take possession, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has spoken to you. Do not fear or be dismayed.' 22" Then all of you approached me and said, 'Let us send men before us, that they may search out the land for us, and bring back to us word of the way by which we should go up and the cities which we shall enter.'

32" But for all this, you did not trust the LORD your God, 33 who goes before you on your way, to seek out a place for you to encamp, in fire by night and cloud by day, to show you the way in which you should go. 34" Then the LORD heard the sound of your words, and He was angry and took an oath, saying, 35' Not one of these men, this evil generation, shall see the good land which I swore to give your fathers, 36 except Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him and to his sons I will give the land on which he has set foot, because he has followed the LORD fully.' 37" The LORD was angry with me also on your account, saying, 'Not even you shall enter there. 38' Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall enter there; encourage him, for he will cause Israel to inherit it. 39' Moreover, your little ones who you said would become a prey, and your sons, who this day have no knowledge of good or evil, shall enter there, and I will give it to them and they shall possess it. 40' But as for you, turn around and set out for the wilderness by the way to the Red Sea.'

At Kadesh-barnea the nation of Israel was at the edge of the Promised Land. The spies came back with a bad report of the Promised Land. They saw the descendants of the Anakim there – a race of giant people (Goliath was also a descendant of the Anakim) and did not believe that God would give them victory. As a result of their unbelief, they gave a bad report and God told them to “turn around and set out for the wilderness”.

Deuteronomy 2:1-3

"Then we turned and set out for the wilderness by the way to the Red Sea, as the LORD spoke to me, and circled Mount Seir for many days. 2" And the LORD spoke to me, saying, 3' You have circled this mountain long enough. Now turn north,

After their rebellion God continued to lead them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night but now He was leading them away from the Promised Land and He was taking them in circles in the desert. After their rebellion, God led them in circles in the desert for 38 years waiting for the adults who had rebelled to die.

Deuteronomy 2:7

"For the LORD your God has blessed you in all that you have done; He has known your wanderings through this great wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you; you have not lacked a thing."

Even after their rebellion at Kadesh-barnea God was kind to Israel in that He made sure all their needs were met as they traveled in the wilderness for 38 years waiting for the adults to die.

Deuteronomy 29:5

"I have led you forty years in the wilderness; your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandal has not worn out on your foot."

God showed his mercy and grace to Israel in that even though they were being disciplined for their rebellion God continued to supernaturally keep their clothes and shoes from wearing out over a 38 year period.

Imagine wearing the same shirt for 40 years. What would it look like at the end of 40 years? But God kept their clothes new even over 40 years!

Exodus 16:31,35

The house of Israel named it manna, and it was like coriander seed, white, and its taste was like wafers with honey.

35The sons of Israel ate the manna forty years, until they came to an inhabited land; they ate the manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.

God showed his mercy and grace to Israel in that even though they were being disciplined for their rebellion God continued to supernaturally provide them manna each day for food over a 40 year period.

Summary: During their 40 years in the desert God provided clear leadership through the pillars of fire and cloud, He supernaturally blessed Israel in that their shoes and clothes did not wear out and they had food (manna) provided everyday. As they travelled in circles in the desert they did not come into conflict with anyone. What might sound like a blessed life was in fact a life with no meaning or impact – a “restless” life.

40 Years Later – Finally Entering the Promised Land

Joshua 5:11-12

On the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. 12The manna ceased on the day after they had eaten some of the produce of the land, so that the sons of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate some of the yield of the land of Canaan during that year.

When Joshua led Israel into the Promised Land things changed. The manna stopped. The pillar of fire and cloud stopped. Their clothes and shoes started to wear out again. The nation entered into constant battle with the inhabitants of Canaan. Although victorious, some of their men died in battle.

Although life became more difficult, Israel was now being used by God to make an impact for Him. Don't confuse the grace and mercy of God to a rebellious people with His approval.

Psalms 95:8-11

Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, As in the day of Massah in the wilderness, 9"When your fathers tested Me, They tried Me, though they had seen My work. 10"For forty years I loathed that generation, And said they are a people who err in their heart, And they do not know My ways. 11"Therefore I swore in My anger, Truly they shall not enter into My rest."

Even though entering the Promised Land meant hardship and battle, God describes it as entering into His rest – Israel was now fulfilling the purpose God had given them.

Hebrews 3:16-19

For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? 17And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? 18And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? 19So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

In the case of the rebellion at Kadesh-barnea a life of clear guidance from God, free food and clothing, no work requirements, and a life without conflict was the result of God loathing people for their rebellion and uselessness.

In contrast, under Joshua's leadership Israel entered into a time of obedience to God (His rest). What did it look like? The free food and clothing stopped, there was constant war and less clear detailed guidance. It also resulted in Israel being used by God to accomplish His purposes and have an eternally valuable impact.

During their 40 years in the wilderness what was life like for Moses?

Moses died at the age of 120.

(Deuteronomy 34:7)

Although Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died, his eye was not dim, nor his vigor abated.

Moses left the Egyptian royal family when he was 40 years old and took care of sheep from age 40 to 80.

(Acts 7:22-30)

Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds. 23 But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. 24 And when he saw one of them being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian. 25 And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him, but they did not understand. 26 On the following day he appeared to them as they were fighting together, and he tried to reconcile them in peace, saying, 'Men, you are brethren, why do you injure one another?' 27 But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and judge over us? 28 You do not mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday, do you?' 29 At this remark, Moses fled and became an alien in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons. 30 "After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning thorn bush.

At the age of 80, Moses spoke to Pharaoh.

(Exodus 7:7)

Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three, when they spoke to Pharaoh.

During their time in the wilderness the nation of Israel continued to worship other gods.

(Acts 7:41-43)

At that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. 42 But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, 'It was not to Me that you offered victims and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, was it, O house of Israel? 43 You also took along the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of the god Rompha, the images which you made to worship. I also will remove you beyond Babylon.'

They constantly complained about Moses and about God.

(Exodus 17:4)

So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me."

Numbers 14:26-29, 34-35

The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ²⁷ "How long *shall I bear* with this evil congregation who are grumbling against Me? I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel, which they are making against Me. ²⁸ Say to them, 'As I live,' says the LORD, 'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will surely do to you; ²⁹ your corpses will fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men, according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me.

³⁴ **According to the number of days which you spied out the land, forty days, for every day you shall bear your guilt a year, *even* forty years, and you will know My opposition. ³⁵ I, the LORD, have spoken, surely this I will do to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be destroyed, and there they will die.'"**

Moses lived for 120 years. But out of that 120 years how many years did Moses look like a success as a religious leader? About 3 years! From a human perspective, he did the miracles in Egypt, he economically destroyed Egypt, he freed Israel and led them out of Egypt, he destroyed the Egyptian military, won battles, and parted the Red Sea. All of that took less than 3 years. After that what happened? Moses led Israel around in circles in the desert for 38 years while everyone complained. If you didn't know about the 3 years of victory during the exodus from Egypt and if you had been living among them during their 38 years in the wilderness, you would have said that Moses looked a lot like a failure. Moses was supposed to lead Israel into the Promised Land. Did he do that? No, he died in the wilderness along with his entire generation! Moses, from a human perspective, spent most of his life looking like a failure. But was Moses a failure? Absolutely not! Moses was a great man of God, but he went through many decades of looking and feeling like a failure. Moses was tested with failure and you will be too. But Moses was faithful to follow and obey God his whole life, even though most of it did not appear to be successful at the time. But he was successful in God's eyes.

Mark 9:2-4

Six days later, Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John, and brought them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; 3 and His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them. 4 Elijah appeared to them along with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus.

What about you? Will you be faithful to obey God even though you may spend much of your life dealing with trials and difficulties rather than success? What enabled Moses to do this?

Hebrews 11:24-26

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, ²⁵ choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, ²⁶ considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.

Moses was motivated to stay faithful to God through many decades of difficulty because he was looking forward to the eternal rewards he would receive at the Judgment.

Fun Fact About Moses

In the movies, Moses is shown as the man standing before Pharaoh declaring God's judgments on Egypt. But in reality, Aaron was the man standing before and talking to Pharaoh. Moses silently stood in the background!

Exodus 4:10-17

**Then Moses said to the Lord, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."
11 The Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? 12 Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say." 13 But he said, "Please, Lord, now send the message by whomever You will." 14 Then the anger of the Lord burned against Moses, and He said, "Is there not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he speaks fluently. And moreover, behold, he is coming out to meet you; when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. 15 You are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will teach you what you are to do. 16 Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people; and he will be as a mouth for you and you will be as God to him. 17 You shall take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs."**

Exodus 7:1-2, 7

Then the LORD said to Moses, "See, I make you as God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. ² You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land.

⁷ Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three, when they spoke to Pharaoh.

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *Moses And Israel In The Wilderness*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Numbers 27:14, Deuteronomy 33:8*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Exodus 13:21-22, Exodus 12:35-36*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Deuteronomy 2:13-14*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Deuteronomy 2:1-7*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Deuteronomy 29:5, Exodus 16:31-35*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Psalm 95:8-11, Hebrews 3:16-19*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Deuteronomy 34:7, Acts 7:22-30, Exodus 7:7*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Exodus 17:4, Numbers 14:26-35*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Mark 9:2-4*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Exodus 4:10-17*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Exodus 7:1-7*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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