

[The Wilderness E4 Transcript]

[Recap and Setup for the Israelites in the Wilderness (0:00—10:06)]

Jon: In the Bible, the wilderness is a lifeless place where death is always right around the corner. And characters find themselves in the wilderness sometimes by their own choices, sometimes by the injustice of others. But God always meets them in the wilderness with mercy. In today's episode, we continue to explore the theme of the wilderness while looking at what's probably the most famous wilderness stories in the Bible, Israel's 40-year wandering in the wilderness.

Tim: Where God has led his people into the wilderness directly and personally.

Jon: When God rescues Israel from Egypt, he promises them a garden-land to live in. And here's the thing, he could have taken them directly to that lush garden-land, but it would bring them right by the Philistines who live in those coastal plains. And God didn't think they were ready to meet them.

Tim: God is aware of the limitations of these people. The Philistines inhabited these coastal plains, and the Israelites are going to see that and be like: "Oh, back to Egypt." God wants to avoid a war that'll make his people want to go back to Egypt.

Jon: And so God brings his people into a long season of wilderness wandering. And this isn't a consequence. This is a training ground.

Tim: The people have been formed in their Egyptian slavery, and it's as if they need to enter into a season where their identity and mindset as slaves needs to get deconstructed, and he's going to recreate his people to have this new, glorious, cosmic identity as a Kingdom of priests, a holy nation, to represent him to all of the nations.

Jon: In the wilderness, Israel's trust in God will be strengthened through tests.

Tim: Really, what Yahweh is after is to deepen the intimacy and the trust in the relationship so that this can become a new and different kind of people who live with a different mindset, even in the face of danger and death.

Jon: Today on the podcast, we'll look at Israel's wanderings in the wilderness as a place where we can learn to live with radical trust. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

[Musical Break (2:21—2:25)]

Jon: Hey, Tim.

Tim: Hey, Jon. Hello.

Jon: Hello. We are talking about the theme of the wilderness—

Tim Mhm.

Jon: The *midbar*.

Tim: Yes.

Jon: We've talked a lot about it so far.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: The *midbar* is this domain where humans can't flourish, where life is on a precipice, on a knife's edge. And there's wild animals out there that can get you.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: There's a lack of water. And it's actually also the place that we learned from Genesis two, by which God created a spring—

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: And everything was created.

Tim: It's one way to imagine the nothingness from which creation was summoned

—

[Laughter]

Tim: From the word and the mind of God.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: A dry land without water.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And then God created a garden, planted it—well, first formed the humans—

Tim: Yeah. Mhm.

Jon: The human.

Tim: Yeah, out of that dry nothingness—

Jon: Yeah.

[Laughter]

Tim: The dust. Yeah.

Jon: He planted a garden, uh, in this wilderness that's now kind of a wet wilderness—

[Laughter]

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Because of the spring—places the human in the garden. “Live with me in the garden. Obey my command,” which is to just enjoy the garden—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: "But don't eat of this one tree." And the humans now, because they've been split in two, male and female, don't trust the voice of God, trust the voice of a snake, and decide to eat of the fruit that God said not to eat, and so then are sent out into the wilderness. And in the wilderness is where, I guess, the rest of the setting of the story of the Bible kind of assumes we are no longer in the lush garden—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: That we're—

Tim: Right.

Jon: Supposed to be in.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: We are now in this period, this domain, where life is on—

Tim: Yeah, a knife—

Jon: A precipice.

Tim: A knife-edge again. And then we meditated on the many reasons why people find themselves in the wilderness in the Bible. And Genesis and Exodus provides multiple closely connected stories about why and how people end up in the wilderness.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And it's always—it's always sad.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. It's always sad.

Jon: And then it gets more and more complicated.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: So first it's simply: "We didn't trust the voice of God. We did the thing we weren't supposed to do."

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: "We can't live in the garden. We live in the wilderness." But then out there, Cain takes his brother out further into the field, into the—

Tim: Hmm. Yeah.

Jon: Into wilderness where no one's there, so he can kill him.

Tim: Mhm. Mhm.

Jon: And he's exiled even further off.

Tim: Yeah, east of Eden.

Jon: East of Eden. Then, God calls this couple, Abraham and Sarah, to leave their land to go to this, like, lush hillside. And there, God's going to multiply them. And they're going to be able to have a great family. All the nations will be blessed. And so there's this promise of the, the seed of a woman who will strike the snake. We're in the wilderness, but we can go back to the garden. And then we talked about how the first real story of someone being sent out into the wilderness after Cain and Abel is, or after Adam and Eve, really, is Hagar.

Tim: Hagar, yeah.

Jon: And Hagar is, of no fault of her own, mistreated, oppressed. And that oppression leads to her, essentially—no choice but to flee out into the wilderness.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: But God meets her there by a well—

Tim: Mhm. Mhm.

Jon: Promises her a family blessing, and—

Tim: Hears and listens to her cry.

Jon: Hears and listens to her cry.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: She's out in the wilderness because of the oppression against her. God meets her there. Then, we read the story of Moses, who flees to the wilderness because he's worried about the justice of Pharaoh.

[Laughter]

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. That's right. Yeah.

Jon: But he killed a man—killed a, a brother.

Tim: Mhm. Out in the wilderness.

[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah. Out in a field.

Tim: Out in the area where there was no one, just a lot of sand.

[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah. But someone saw him, and so they know. And so he flees out into the wilderness. And all these stories kind of come together. Not only are they hyperlinked together, but then in the characters, they come together because when Moses goes out, he meets these Midianite women—

Tim: Mhm. Mhm.

Jon: Who are of the tribe—

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: That has come from Hagar's—

Tim: Son.

Jon: Son.

Tim: Ishmael.

Jon: And he helps protect some of those women. Then, he's brought into that family. And so he starts to find a life of blessing of sorts out in the wilderness.

Tim: That's right. And then God sees and hears the cry of the oppressed immigrants that are now the Israelites. And it's the Egyptians doing to the Israelites what the Israelite's ancestors did to the Egyptian.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: So either by the fault of someone else or the fault of our own, we end up in the wilderness.

Tim: Yeah. Yep.

Jon: And in both cases, God wants and does meet people there—

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And hears their cry. And there can be a spring in the wilderness.

Tim: Yep. That's right. So in this episode, we're going to go one step further, and we're going to see one more reason why people end up in the wilderness. And this will be a new twist. It's with the same characters from the Moses story, but, essentially, this time, it's God who leads people out into the wilderness, like, directly and personally.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So it's yet another twist—

[Laughter]

Jon: Okay.

Tim: On how people end up in the wilderness.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So what we're going to focus on are the moments where God has led his people into the wilderness, and there is a crisis of trust, and people start crying out, like, grumbling, and getting angry, and it becomes a big conflict between God and his people in the wilderness about the provision of water and food. And these are actually probably the most familiar wilderness stories. If somebody is semi-biblically literate, they probably associate the wilderness with the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: This is the part of Israel's story that gets told and retold many times in the Torah, and Prophets, and the Psalms, and echoed in the New Testament many times over. So these are well-known stories to many. So I j—I want to meditate on the two sets of wilderness stories, but the twist here from where we have been is that God leads them into the wilderness.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So first, let's kind of catch up with: How did God lead them into the wilderness—

Jon: Yeah. And why.

Tim: And why? Okay.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: All right, let's start there.

[Musical Break (09:38—10:06)]

[God's Intentional Path Into the Wilderness (10:06—27:11)]

Tim: So one thing that's important to know about Egypt is Egypt was the place of the Israelites' oppression and slavery. However, it was a well-watered and abundant land—

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Because of the Nile River Delta. And you mentioned, you can look on a satellite photo still today—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And see how lush and green it is in the wide region.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And this is how it's been for thousands of years. Um, in Genesis 13, when Abraham and Lot part ways in the Abraham story and Lot lifts up his eyes, we're told in Genesis 13, verse 10: And he sees that the Jordan Valley is well-watered everywhere. And then the narrator says: "It was like the garden of Yahweh and like the land of Egypt."

[Laughter]

Tim: So the Jordan Valley is compared to the garden of Eden—

[Laughter]

Jon & Tim: And Egypt.

[Laughter]

Tim: And you're like—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: "Wow. Okay."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "Lots of water there." In Deuteronomy 11, Moses says of the land of Egypt that it was a place where people "sowed seed and watered it with their feet." He's likely referring to, like, foot-powered irrigation pumps because they would build these big farming operations on the banks of the Nile to pump water up out of the Nile into these, you know, fields and gardens. They would use, like, foot pumps.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Anyway, it's kind of cool.

Jon: That is cool.

Tim: So even though it was the land of their slavery, there was a lot of food. Not that they were always—got to benefit from all that food—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But there was a lot of food there. It's the opposite of the wilderness. Egypt—

Jon: That's interesting because when I think of slavery, I think of that as a wilderness kind of situation.

Tim: Yeah. Right. Right.

Jon: But their slavery was in a garden.

Tim: Yeah. Someone else's garden.

Jon: But it was someone else's garden—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: That they didn't get to have dominion over. Yeah.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. So Moses, from where we left him out in the wilderness in the last episode and in your summary, was—that's where God meets Moses is in the wilderness on top of a tall hill in a tree that's on fire, a tree-bush.

Jon: Hmm. Out in Midian.

Tim: Yeah. And God says: "I've heard the cry of my people. I've seen their oppression, and I'm going to send you to go back and confront Pharaoh, tell him to let my people go." And there's the whole burning bush conversation. Moses is not really down for this idea, but he goes in the end anyway. He ends up meeting up with his brother, Aaron, and he goes to the people, his own people, and they believe him. And so they go to Pharaoh. Pharaoh says, you know: "Who is Yahweh? I don't know Yahweh. I'm not going to let the people go." And that's the onset of the 10 plagues that culminates in Passover.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Um, so where we're picking up right now is literally the paragraph after Passover—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: The night of Passover.

Jon: 10th plague, Passover night—

Tim: 10th pla—that's right. And so it's in Exodus 13, verse 17. It's unfortunate that there isn't a chapter break here because this is literally the moment that they leave Egypt—

Jon: Okay. This is a new literary unit.

Tim: After ha—it's a—yeah. Big turning point in the narrative.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So in 13:17 is the moment they go out into the wilderness. We'll see. It's the first time that "wilderness" is used to describe where the people are going.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And there's just an interesting little paragraph here that is so fascinating, bristling with interesting things to think about. So Exodus 13, verse 17: "So it came about when Pharaoh sent out the people—"so there it is, he sent them out.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: "That God did not lead them by the path of the land of the Philistines, even though that was the closer path."

Jon: Hmm. What path is this?

Tim: Yeah. So what we're referring to here—let me go back.

Jon: We're looking at a map again.

Tim: Looking at a map. If you want to get from the Nile Delta, on a map, up to—

Jon: Jerusalem, or the—

Tim: Up to the land of Canaan—

Jon: Hillside, yeah.

Tim: Yeah. The easiest way to go is just to follow the Nile—

Jon: To the coast.

Tim: To the coast of the Mediterranean—

Jon: And then follow the coastline.

Tim: And then just follow the coastal highway.

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: And there's still a coastal highway here today.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Mhm. It's the quickest and easiest route.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But in—

Jon: That's—

Tim: Ancient times—

Jon: And that's the route of the Philistines?

Tim: That's—the Philistines inhabited these coastal plains—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Of the southern edge of the land of Canaan. So that's a closer way.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That would be the most direct route.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And that is not the way that God takes.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: He doesn't take them on the direct route. Why? Well, we get a little window into a conversation God had with God's self.

[Laughter]

Tim: And he says: "Well, the people will probably have a change of heart." That's how I've translated it. It's the word *nacham*, which is used to describe how you

need to bring comfort to yourself over the consequence of a decision that you've made that's unfortunate—unfortunate consequence.

Jon: Really?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: It's a very precise word.

[Laughter]

Tim: Yeah. It's the word "comfort." So you can bring comfort to somebody else if something bad has happened.

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: But then you can make it a reflexive to comfort yourself—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Over something bad that's happened that—

Jon: To you.

Tim: Or—

Jon: Or—

Tim: To you or that—

Jon: Because of something you've done.

Tim: Because of something that you did. Yeah.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So this is what God does after the flood when he smells Noah's sacrifice.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: That's the first time that the word is used in the Bible.

Jon: Okay. So the word just generally means comfort—

Tim: It means—

Jon: But in different contexts—

Tim: That's right.

Jon: It could mean you're comforting yourself because you got yourself in a bad situation.

Tim: Yeah. Or just something that you did brought an unpleasant consequence, and now you need to comfort yourself over it.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So this is usually translated in our modern translations as "change your mind."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: This is what God does when Moses intercedes over the golden calf.

Jon: Oh.

Tim: God says in—

Jon: This is the word.

Tim: This is that word.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So now God says: "The people might *nacham* themselves when they see war, and they will go back to Egypt."

Jon: Meaning, if—when they run into the Philistines, Philistines—

Tim: Yes.

Jon: Are going to be like—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: "Hey, guys."

Tim: "Hey—"

Jon: "Nope, not this way."

Tim: Y—totally.

[Laughter]

Tim: The Philistines will watch, like, this huge group of—

Jon: Yeah, this—

Tim: Immigrants—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Coming up the coastal highway—

Jon: Right.

Tim: And it's like: "What? No."

Jon: "Prepare for war." Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. So they're going to go meet them in war, and the Israelites are going to see that and be like: "Oh, back to Egypt."

[Laughter]

Tim: "Let's go back."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So God says that's what's going to happen—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: "If I take them the short route."

Jon: And that—that's the—and that's the way they'll comfort themselves.

[Laughter]

Tim: And so they will bring comfort to themselves—

Jon: By turning around.

Tim: By turning around.

Jon: Which is kind of a changing of your mind.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Okay. I see.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. That's it. So what does God do? Well: "The Elohim took the people around by the path of the *midbar*—took them into the wilderness." So in that—

Jon: So he took them into the wilderness because they weren't ready for the conflict.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. Now, ironically, instead of them going into an arena of conflict, of battle, of war, the war is going to follow them because Pharaoh's, right after this, is going to be like: "Oh no, what have we done?" Pharaoh has a change of heart.

[Laughter]

Tim: He *nachams* himself.

Jon: He comforts himself.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: That he let the people go.

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: And so then he chases after them and tries to make war with them.

Jon: He would have chased them whatever route they went on.

Tim: That's probably true. Yeah. But the point is is that God wants to avoid a war that'll make his people want to go back to Egypt, but the war follows the Israelites —

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Anyway.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And then, as we're going to see, the Israelites end up wanting to go back to Egypt also anyway—

[Laughter]

Tim: Because they don't have enough food.

Jon: But is there something here? There's this sense of: They need time to prepare themselves.

Tim: Yes. Yeah.

Jon: There's a time of preparation they need.

Tim: Yeah. This is a fascinating little window into: Why—one is, you could just say it's an explanation of why they didn't go the direct route.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: "Well, God says they're not ready." But there's, I think, something more significant going on in that God is aware of the limitations of these people.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: He's going to invite them into a covenant partnership, and he's going to revive the Abraham promise to bless a people so that they can become a blessing to others. We know, at Mount Sinai, he's going to enroll them as a Kingdom of priests, a holy nation, to represent him to all of the nations. And so God is, here, aware of, like, the limitations o—of the people that he's working with, and God accommodates to those limitations, and he's patient, kind of guiding them. So they end up in the wilderness because God is being attentive to their needs. Isn't that interesting?

Jon: They need the wilderness, is what you're saying?

Tim: Well, they're going to enter in the wilderness for a long season—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And God is the one leading them on purpose—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Into the—

Jon: Because they're not ready—

Tim: Place where they can't—

Jon: For the direct route.

Tim: Protect themselves, where they can't provide for themselves. God's the one taking them into the wilderness. And we're going to meditate on this for this episode and the next one because Moses, in particular, sees a mysterious divine purpose at work here that, actually, the people have been formed in their Egyptian slavery, and it's as if they need to enter into a season where their identity and mindset as slaves needs to get deconstructed and recreated.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And he's going to recreate his people to have this new, glorious, cosmic identity.

[Laughter]

Jon: And it's going to require a journey through the wilderness.

Tim: And that requires a long trek through a place where you can't protect yourself or provide for yourself.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And God's the one doing that on purpose. But there's also this little note that he's doing it because he's aware of their weakness.

Jon: Mhm. They're not ready for the direct route.

Tim: Not ready. Yeah. So there's just something to ponder: that God doesn't immediately take them to Canaan. Because here's what we are about to learn: When the war follows them in the form of Pharaoh, God single-handedly deals—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: With the armies of Egypt.

Jon: Yeah. That's interesting.

Tim: Which makes you think like: God could have done that with the Philistines.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So like, what—

Jon: It wasn't about the army.

Tim: It wasn't about the army.

Jon: Something—

Tim: It's about the people.

Jon: About the people. The people would turn back.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: That's—yeah. That's what he says.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: The people will turn back. They'll comfort themselves. They'll turn back.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And so what's going to make this a type of people that, when they see—

Tim: Oh, good. Good.

Jon: Something—

Tim: When they see death coming—

Jon: When they see, yeah, death coming, they won't turn back.

Tim: Mhm. Whoa. Yes. That's right.

Jon: It's going to require a formation of their, of their hearts.

Tim: That's great. Yeah. Going by the coastal route will lead to a collision with the Philistines. And at this point, they'll see death coming in the form of Philistine armies—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Marching with swords and spears—

Jon: They're going to run right back to Egypt.

Tim: And they're going right back into slavery.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So God takes them, on purpose, into the nothingness—

[Laughter]

Tim: Right?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Into the waterless region. And turns out, an army is going to follow them anyway, and God's going to drown that army in the waters.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: But them going through that experience ends with them—Chapter 14 of Exodus ends with saying: "And then the Israelites trusted in Yahweh."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So really what Yahweh is after is to deepen the intimacy and the trust in the relationship so that this can become a new and different, yeah, kind of people who live with a different mindset when they see death coming.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Yeah. I guess this is sort of, like, fitting in with this motif—I'm thinking in stories where you have, like, the young apprentice who's trying to solve a problem in their life—right? And the, like—the sage guru can actually see what they really need—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: You know, but the apprentice cannot.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And so the sage guru—

[Laughter]

Tim: Leads the apprentice on all of these formative—

Jon: Trials.

Tim: Experiences—trials—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That actually are teaching the apprentice what they need, but that the apprentice doesn't think it's what they need.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It's kind of like that. We're in that territory here.

Jon: It's interesting to think about: There's a direct route back to the garden.

Tim: Mmm. Mhm.

Jon: When we talk about Adam and Eve being exiled from the garden, they're right there.

Tim: Oh, so good.

Jon: They can get right back.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And I mean, you can imagine the story where God's like: "Okay, guys, I've given you a week or a month—"

Tim: Yeah, totally.

[Laughter]

Jon: "You've thought about it—"

Tim: Yeah: "It really sucks out here, doesn't it?"

Jon: "The snake's going to come back—"

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: "Again, even if I let you back in the garden. Are you ready for him this time? Let's, let's try."

Tim: Mmm.

Jon: "Why don't you come back in?"

Tim: Mmm.

Jon: Well, you know, instead, I guess maybe he doesn't have time to do that move because then Cain murders Abel and—

Tim: Yeah.

[Laughter]

Tim: Totally.

Jon: Driven out further east.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: But it—the sense of like, there is a direct route back in. Like, the garden is not that far—

Tim: Yeah. That's good.

Jon: In a sense.

Tim: That's right. Yeah.

Jon: But like there's something about humanity that it's not as simple as just: Plop us back in the garden.

Tim: Yeah. Actually, that's what God said. He said: "Now, they're like one of us, knowing good and bad." So humanity is not yet, given the state that they're in now—they're not yet ready to be near the tree of life. They're—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Not ready for it. They need to undergo some kind of transformation. That's what you're keying in on here—that you're seeing that—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Idea being repeated here with regard to the Israelites. They are not ready to go back into the garden-land.

Jon: Mhm. Yeah. This journey theme was in our Redemption conversation, and it's, it's really stuck with me in that we ended that conversation being kind of mystical, talking about union with God.

Tim: Oh. Hmm.

Jon: And the point of humanity is this—not—humans are not God. We are other, created by God, independent, to then reflect and be God's image and learn to unite with God. And to do that is this process. It's this journey of learning to unite with God. And what is this journey?

[Laughter]

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: This is—

Tim: Journey through the land of deprivation and danger, of lack of protection and provision. Because ultimately our lives were given to us from someone outside ourselves in the first place. And so our lives were never really ours to try and sustain anyway. We just think that we can.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And we can for a little while. And that's maybe why it's a real partnership with God. But God's the ultimate provider and protector. And so the wilderness for the Israelites becomes a part of the divine purpose to mold his people into a kind of people who will trust even in the face of danger and death.

Jon: I guess to say, there's a direct route to the garden, but there's not a direct route to unity with God.

Tim: Oh, whoa. That's good, Jon. I like that. That's right. For that, we have to undergo—

Jon: There's a process.

Tim: We have to g—undergo a process. Yeah. And I guess really the process is about—at the transformation of our desire.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: What do I desire more, my ability to engineer my own provision and protection, or to trust that my ultimate provision and protection comes from a place outside myself?

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Okay. So let's hold this. This is what the wilderness tests are all about—

[Laughter]

Tim: Precisely this.

[Musical Break (26:43—27:11)]

[Three Wilderness Tests in Exodus (27:11—47:28)]

Tim: And so the Israelites, they just stepped out of Egypt into the wilderness and not by the direct route, on the long route. And where does it take them? It first takes them to the edge of a huge body of water.

[Laughter]

Tim: And maybe it's not quite right, I'm going to skip over that story.

[Laughter]

Tim: We've talked about—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: God delivering his people at the Sea of Reeds.

Jon: Right. Let's get through the water.

Tim: Get—yeah. So they go through the waters.

Jon: Which is a type of wilderness.

Tim: That's right. In Exodus 15:22, which is after they sing the song of salvation, we read: "And Moses caused Israel to set out from the Sea of Reeds, and they went out into the *midbar*, the *midbar* of Shur."

Jon: This is where Hagar was headed towards.

Tim: This is where Hagar was headed towards from the opposite direction.

Jon: Oh.

Tim: She was fleeing from Canaan—

Jon: Back to Egypt.

[Laughter]

Tim: Back to Egypt by way of Shur.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And they're fleeing from Egypt—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: To Canaan—

[Laughter]

Tim: By the way of Shur. "And they traveled three days."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Dun, dun, dun, dun—"Into the *midbar*. And look, they found no water."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Hmm.

Jon: Did you do a "dun, dun, dun—"

[Laughter]

Jon: Because—

Tim: I know, that was corny—

Jon: Three days is a testing theme?

Tim: Yes. Yeah. Three days—

Jon: Three—

Tim: Is usually a crisis.

Jon: Crisis moment.

Tim: Crisis moment. Yep.

Jon: Moment of test.

Tim: On the—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: On the third day. It was for Abraham.

Jon: When was Abraham tested on the third day?

Tim: Oh, uh, he went three days with Isaac to get to Mount Moriah.

Jon: Oh, Okay.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Three days to M—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Moriah.

Tim: Moses' mom hid Moses as a baby for three months, and then in the third month, she put him in the ark.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: She surrendered him. So this is part of the accumulating symbolism of “on the third day” or “for three days” as being a time of—

Jon: Yeah, or on the third.

Tim: On the third. That's right. Yep. So they traveled three days. They didn't find water. So what happens in Exodus 15, 16, and 17 here—there's three stories of crises in the wilderness. First one's about water. Second one's about bread—no bread. And the third one's about water again. So: water, bread, water.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So the first one begins—

Jon: It's a bread sandwich.

Tim: That's right. Yeah. Tota—

[Laughter]

Tim: That's right.

[Laughter]

Jon: That's a weird sandwich.

Tim: A soggy.

Jon: Soggy.

[Laughter]

Tim: Oh, no, it's not. There's no water. So—

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: I don't know what you—

Jon: Or is it a cracker? We're just eating a cracker here.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. Some matzah. So it's three days in the desert, no water. Exodus 16 begins: "They set out and came to the *midbar* of Sin on the 15th day of the second month after they went out from Egypt, and all the community of the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the desert, saying: 'We have nothing to eat.'"

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Exodus 17 begins: "They set out from the desert of Sin, and they camped at Rephidim, and there was no water, and so the people quarreled with Moses, saying: 'Give us water to drink.'"

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: So here we go. Here's the crisis.

Jon: Yeah. They're kind of being forced into fasting.

[Laughter]

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: And when you're fasting in your own environment—

[Laughter]

Jon: And you know you can pull the plug anytime you want to—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: It's still hard.

Tim: It's still hard.

[Laughter]

Jon: I'm sure it's still really hard.

Tim: Yes. Yeah. But—

Jon: And here they are. They're in the wilderness. They're on a forced fast.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: Who knows how long it's going to last?

Tim: Yep.

Jon: Who knows if they're going to last?

Tim: Yep. Three days.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: I mean, that's serious. And then what happens right after this first story is then they come to an oasis, and they do find water, and we're just told that it's undrinkable. It's bitter.

Jon: Oh my gosh. Yeah.

Tim: So it's like double.

Jon: Miserable.

Tim: It's like: "First we can't find water, then we do find water, and we can't drink it." So what happens in each of these three stories is there's a moment where God steps in and he invites them to trust. And what we find here is the language either of listening to God's instruction or following his commands. Um, the word "trust" is not used, but it's kind of implicit in all of this. So in the first story, what happens at the bitter waters that they can't drink in Exodus 15 is Moses cried out to Yahweh and Yahweh instructed him about a tree.

[Laughter]

Tim: That's the word "Torah" as a verb: "instruct."

Jon: About a tree.

Tim: Yeah. He gave an instruction about a tree.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Come on.

Jon: Come now.

Tim: Come on.

Jon: Oh, there you go.

Tim: So now it's—

[Laughter]

Tim: A crisis for Moses. He's got to figure out what to do with this tree. And we're just told that Moses threw the tree into the waters, and the waters became drinkable.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Mmm.

Jon: This is usually translated "branch."

Tim: Oh, I think so. Or yeah, "log" or—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: I don't know.

Jon: It's the word *etz*, right?

Tim: It's *etz*, yeah.

Jon: It's tree.

Tim: "Tree." Mhm. So you were in a death-situation, but Yahweh gave instruction about a tree, and that tree becomes a source of life in the face of death because of the obedience of Moses. Way to go, Moses. And then the narrator stops, and he says: "There, he made for them a rule and a regulation." And there the "he" seems to likely equal Yahweh—"made for them," that is, for the people—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: "A rule and regulation. And there Yahweh tested them and said: 'If you listen to the voice of Yahweh—'" and it's a double verb in Hebrew—"If you *shema*, *shema*—"

Jon: "'You listen, listen'"?

Tim: Yeah. "'If you listen, listen to the voice of Yahweh, and do what is right in his eyes, and listen to his commands, and keep his rules, then I won't bring on you any of the diseases I brought on Egypt. I, Yahweh, am your healer.'"

Jon: Why is he bringing up diseases in Egypt?

Tim: Yeah. Ah, what was the first plague on Egypt? It was: The Nile became blood, and the waters were undrinkable.

Jon: Undrin—oh, okay. So they're experiencing that plague in a way.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: But God says: "I gotcha."

Tim: Yeah. "I gotcha. I can heal the waters, make them drinkable."

Jon: So you're going to come upon all sorts of these crises.

Tim: Yeah. In other words, this little story that just happened is called a test. And it's—God gives a rule and regulation, which means this is going to become a pattern of how—

Jon: Ah—

Tim: We relate.

Jon: Yeah. Okay. "You're going to run into what looks like a plague or just a straight up—"

[Laughter]

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: "Crisis-plague—"

Tim: Yep.

Jon: And if you listen to my voice, you follow my commands, I got ya."

Tim: "I gotcha. I will bring healing," which in this story was God's instruction about a tree that brings life.

Jon: Okay.

[Laughter]

Tim: So lots of Eden echoes about God's command about the tree of knowing good and bad to Adam and Eve so that they could stay close to the tree of life,

and they didn't. That story was not called a test, but this makes you kind of back-reflect to be like: "Oh, that kind of was—that command to Adam and Eve was a kind of test, a test of trust." So that's the water crisis story. The second story is the manna story—to—where manna is introduced, the bread in the wilderness. And here God says: "I'm going to rain down bread from the skies on you. And here's what I want. I want the people to gather just one day's portion, not a week's worth. Don't try and grab a month's worth."

Jon: Right.

Tim: "Just bread of the day."

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Jesus was onto this—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: In the Lord's Prayer.

Jon: Hmm. The daily bread.

Tim: Mmh. "Take only enough for one day." And in Exodus 16:4, God says why. "So that I may test them whether they will walk in my Torah or not."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Isn't that interesting.

Jon: Hmm. It's another test.

Tim: It's another test. It's a little bit different, though.

Jon: This is a tricky test because when you're in the wilderness—

[Laughter]

Jon: And there's bread—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Miraculous bread raining down from the skies—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: It's actually kind of ridiculous not to just grab as much as you can.

Tim: As mu—I know. It makes all the sense in the world.

Jon: "Grab as much as you can."

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. Okay. So let's compare this back to the story where they enter the wilderness. There, God said: "I'm not going to take them the direct route."

Jon: "They're not ready."

Tim: "They're not ready." So apparently, there are going to be some experiences in the *midbar*, the wilderness, that will get them ready to face a wall of soldiers who want to kill them. And one is: when you are looking at a desert that's going to kill you—

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: Or you're looking at a oasis in the desert and you can't dr—drink it.

Jon: Okay, yeah. So this is really interesting. Side by side, these stories feel like opposites in a way. Like—

Tim: Oh, y—

Jon: Opposite li—

Tim: Oh, good.

Jon: Lessons. "You're facing water you can't drink, and you're thirsty. Trust me. Trust my voice. I'll heal the water."

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: So you're facing scarcity and famine—or like, you know, drought.

Tim: Mhm. Mhm.

Jon: And then in the next story—

Tim: Yes. Good.

Jon: They're facing abundance.

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: Like, bread has rained down from heaven.

[Laughter]

Jon: It is everywhere.

[Laughter]

Jon: And God says: "Okay, hold on."

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: "Trust me."

Tim: "Don't take too much."

Jon: "Just take what you need today."

Tim: "Just take—"yeah.

Jon: It's like the opposite situation.

Tim: That's so good.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That's great. That's a great observation.

Jon: He's training them in both of those situations.

Tim: Mmm. Mmm. Yes. What to do when you have—

Jon: This is "paint the fence" and "wax the car."

Tim: Oh, oh—what do you—

[Laughter]

Tim: You're right.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So now you're hyperlinking to—

[Laughter]

Jon: *Karate Kid*.

Tim: *Karate Kid*.

Jon: We've talked about it before.

Tim: With the sage guru who's—

Jon: With the sage guru.

Tim: Who's teaching the apprentice what they need to know—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Not what they want to know.

Jon: Right.

Tim: He's trying to form them into a people who trust when there's scarcity.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: The manna story is in a larger season of scarcity, but then God gives an abundance.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And then how do you become—

Jon: How do you deal with it?

Tim: How do you become the kind of people God wants you to be when you're dealing with too much good?

Jon: Mmm. Yeah.

Tim: But the context for that "too much good" is i—what's in reality: You're in the desert.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Like, in reality—

Jon: And that's—

Tim: There's not enough.

Jon: You know what? And that's really the way—

[Laughter]

Jon: We always experience too much good.

Tim: Oh, that's true. Yes. Yeah.

Jon: As just this fear of like: "Well, one day—"we, we don't have to go too far to realize we're still in this wilderness.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: "So I got to, like, store up my good."

[Laughter]

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Everyone feels that way—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: No matter how much bread from heaven—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: There is.

Tim: Oh, man.

Jon: You still feel the wilderness around you.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: You know?

Tim: Absolutely. And even if you have been, for a long time, in a season of stability or more-than-you-need, it's easy to think about: "But there might come a moment where—"

Jon: The wilderness is r—on our heels.

Tim: "Creeps in, so I better stock up for—"

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. This is totally what Jesus is after in the Lord's Prayer. "Give us today the bread of t—"hmm.

Jon: "Today."

Tim: "The bread of the moment—"

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "The bread of existence."

Jon: Oh, right.

Tim: Remember this is the interesting—

Jon: Epiousia.

Tim: Epiousia.

Jon: Epiousia.

Tim: Yep. "The bread of the moment" or of "existence."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But we need bread, but we want to get too much of it in our storehouses so that we don't have to stress out and don't have to trust God.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Okay. Thank you. That's a wonderful observation. In the story that comes after the manna—and once again, there was no water to drink. "Give us water that we can drink." This is wh—

Jon: The backside of the water sandwich.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Or the bread sandwich—

Tim: Backsi—yeah. Yeah.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: What Moses says is: “These people are going to kill me.” He cries out to God, and he says—

Jon: “They’re so thirsty they’re going to kill me.”?

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. He’s really worried.

Jon: I’ve been there with my kids.

[Laughter]

Tim: Ye—hangry. They get so hangry?

Jon: Yeah. Or sometimes in the car. You’re driving home, and everyone’s dehydrated, and there’s no water bottle.

Tim: Mmm. No water bottle in the car.

Jon: No water bottle in the car is a nightmare.

[Laughter]

Tim: Yes. And you’re like: “Dang it. I try to always bring the water bottle.”

Jon: Yeah. Mhm.

Tim: So you’ve had—

[Laughter]

Tim: Thirsty, hangry kids.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Um, who want to—

Jon: That are rising up against you.

[Laughter]

Tim: Totally.

[Laughter]

Tim: Yeah. And so when the people say: “Give us water to drink,” Moses says to them: “Why are you picking a fight with me? Why do you test the Lord?”

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: “Why are you testing Yahweh?”

Jon: Yeah. Okay.

Tim: So it’s this inversion. Yahweh tested his people at the first water crisis.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: But now the people picking a fight with Moses, because of the lack of water, he sees as: “You’re testing God.”

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: “You’re trying to make God force his hand.”

Jon: I don’t know if I get it.

Tim: Well, the word “test” means trying to create a situation for someone that will expose the truth about them—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: By the choice that they make.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So that’s what God did for the Israelites. He tested them at the waters.

Jon: Yeah, okay.

Tim: But now the people are testing God.

Jon: What they should be doing is asking God for water?

Tim: Hmm.

Jon: Or saying: “God, you told us if we are experiencing a lack, we listen to your voice, we’re not going to experience the plagues.”

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: “So tell us what to do.”

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: And instead, they just rise up against Moses.

Tim: Right. Yeah.

Jon: But by asking God: “What should we do? We want to hear your voice. Tell us what to do.” That’s not a test. What would that be called? That’s testing God in a way. “This is the moment, God.”

Tim: I guess it’s just asking. It’s: “Ask, seek, knock—”

[Laughter]

Tim: As Jesus—

Jon: Right?

Tim: Would say.

Jon: But in both situations, you're putting God in a situation, saying: "God, show up and do the thing—"

Tim: Oh—

Jon: "You said you were going to do."

Tim: That's great. Yeah. That's good.

Jon: It's—

Tim: That's good.

Jon: So if a test is saying: "Here's the crisis moment. Show up." Asking is—

Tim: Mmm. Mmm.

Jon: What's the difference between asking—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And grumbling? I mean, I can kind of—

Tim: Yeah, yeah.

Jon: You know, you can tell what the difference is.

Tim: Well, here, let's—here, the narrator then provides the grumble.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: They grumble in verse three. "They grumbled against Moses and said: 'Why have you brought us out of Egypt?'"

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: "Is it to kill us—"

Jon: Right.

Tim: "And our children, and all these animals with thirst? You're trying to kill us."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So—

Jon: That's no—kind of the opposite of asking God for help—is accusing God of —

Tim: Yeah. Accusing Moses—

Jon: Or accusing Moses.

Tim: And by implication, God. You're testing God—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: By accusing Moses of a secret plot to bring us out here to kill us. So it's kind of more: They've made a conclusion.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And that's called a t—

Jon: Why is that called a test?

Tim: Yeah. That's interesting. Hmm. By their grumbling, they're trying to force Moses, and therefore God, to prove himself. "Prove who you are."

Jon: And they're doing it from a stance of—

Tim: Mmm.

Jon: "We can't trust you. We think you're out to get us."

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. When we get to the wilderness test of Jesus—

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: We're going to find the same thing with the slanderer's invitation that Jesus jump off the highest point of the temple. It's about—

Jon: And he'll call it a test.

Tim: Forcing God's hand to save you. And Jesus says: "Don't test God. I'm not going to test God."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So it's about, in this kind of demanding way, trying to force God into—

Jon: "Do it on my terms."

Tim: Doing it on our terms. But here, they don't even ask God for anything. They just—

Jon: They just complain.

Tim: Accuse Moses. And he calls that testing God.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yeah. Ah, it's interes—it's good. That's one of those things where somehow you asking the question is making me probe at it in a way that I thought I understood it, but now there's things about it that I haven't thought about.

[Laughter]

Tim: So thank you for that.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So Moses cries to God and says: "Uh, these people are going to kill me." And God's response is: "In front of all the people, take that staff that you struck the Nile—"

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And this is also an echo back to the first plague when he struck the water and it turned into blood.

Jon: Mmm. Okay.

Tim: Do you remember how that—

Jon: He did that with his staff?

Tim: The previous water story in chapter 15 of Exodus echoed—

Jon: Oh—

Tim: That, that plague.

Jon: The: "Take the tree. Put the tree in the water. The water will become healed."

Tim: "Healed." That's right. God says: "I won't bring on you the plagues of Egypt or the sicknesses of Egypt."

Jon: And the first plague of Egypt was when Moses took his staff—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Touched the river, river—

Tim: That's right.

Jon: Turns to blood.

Tim: Yeah. That's right.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So—

Jon: So now the staff—

Tim: Now this story—and again—

[Laughter]

Tim: This is a little symmetrical—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Sandwich—

Jon: Yeah. Yeah.

Tim: This is the other side of the sandwich, and it is also echoing the first plague.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So: "Take that staff that made the water of the Nile undrinkable, and there's this rock that I'm going to lead you to." And God says: "I will stand in front of you there on the rock at *Khorev*, and you're going to strike the rock, and water will come out of it."

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: This is so fascinating. So whatever we're supposed to have in our minds of God being on the rock, so that when Moses strikes it, it's like he's striking God on the rock—so—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Such a puzzling image—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: With lots of important hyperlinks that come later in the Bible that—

Jon: God being a rock?

Tim: God being the rock and then—

Jon: And then God being the suffering servant—

Tim: God—

Jon: Or the suffering servant?

Tim: Being the one who was struck. Yeah. But somehow it was at God's own direction that God is struck.

[Laughter]

Jon: Hmm. Okay.

Tim: So Moses did that. And we're not even told that water comes out of the rock. We're just told that Moses did what God said.

Jon: Wait, what?

Tim: So God gives Moses the command to go strike the rock that God's standing on. And God said water will come out of it for the people to drink. And then it just—there's a little summary: "Then, Moses did that in the eyes of the elders of Israel."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And then Moses—he gave the place two names. He named it “test” and “quarrel,” or “*masah*” and “*meribah*,” because of the quarreling of the sons of Israel they, they picked a fight, and because they tested the Lord, saying: “Is Yahweh among us or is he not?”

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Now, there’s the cloud, and the fire, and the pillar.

[Laughter]

Jon: Clear signs that he’s with them?

Tim: Yeah. So they’re testing God—

Jon: We haven’t talked about that at all.

Tim: No—oh, that’s a good point.

[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah. When we talked about God leading them not—

Tim: Oh—

Jon: In one route, the other—

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: That’s happening with this pillar of fire.

Tim: He’s leading them by a huge fire-pillar-cloud.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. So whatever the test is, they’re doubting whether God’s among us or not, and so they’re trying to force God’s hand into providing provision on their own schedule.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And instead, what God is trying to do is form them to trust that, when they truly need what they need, God will provide it for them in the way and in the timing that God knows. But picking a fight with God and with God's representative, Moses—

Jon: Hmm. Not the way to do it?

Tim: Yeah. S—it's no good. So *masah* and *meribah*. So we got two things. We have the portrait of the people, what feels like, man, things are not going well. This is the first little three set of testing stories. And then from here, the people go to Mount Sinai.

[Musical Break (47:00—47:28)]

[Seven Wilderness Tests in Numbers (47:28—1:02:24)]

Tim: So a cool thing—we've talked in the past about the symmetrical, macro design of—

Jon: Of the Torah?

Tim: Of the Torah. Because we have these wilderness narratives, then you have the Mount Sinai narrative that is long, like, it's the whole rest of Exodus, all of Leviticus, and then the first 10 chapters of Numbers. And that's where God makes a covenant, enlists the people, it's the golden calf—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Thing that breaks—

Jon: Gives—

Tim: The covenant. Through Moses' intercession, he repairs the covenant, and then the covenant's back on.

Jon: Also, they got law code and tabernacle.

Tim: Covenant laws. They got a priesthood. Yahweh is in their midst, now in the form of a fancy tent that has the cloud over it. Yeah. And then that's the setup as they leave Mount Sinai.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Now, they're like a sacred army with God in their midst. And that's what all the instructions about transporting the, the tabernacle and moving in the arrangement of the camps going out from Numbers—so when they finally leave Mount Sinai in Numbers chapter 10, the cloud lifted from over the tabernacle, and the sons of Israel set out on their journeys from the *midbar* of Sinai. Then, the cloud settled down in the *midbar* of Paran. So now they're moving on. And what follows are seven stories that all take place in the wilderness—

Jon: On the other side of Sinai?

Tim: On the other side of Sinai. And what's so interesting is the first one in Numbers 10:33: "They set out from the mountain of Yahweh, from Sinai, a journey of three days."

Jon: Bum, bum, bum.

[Laughter]

Tim: And then you're like: "Oh, oh man, how's this going to go? Is this going to go different? Is it going to be—"

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "The same?" And it's actually neither of those, uh, it's worse.

[Laughter]

Tim: It's worse.

[Laughter]

Tim: So the first story is just the people become complainers of adversity in the hearing of the Lord. So they're just like: "It stinks out here. We don't want to be out here in the *midbar*."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So that's the first story.

[Laughter]

Tim: The second story is the rabble, the, the mixed multitude, on—who this crew is among Israel is super interesting. We don't have time. But, um, it's a whole bunch of Israelites who have greedy desires, and they start to say: "Where's the meat? We want meat to eat."

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: "We remember the fish that we ate for free in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, the garlic, and now—what—there's nothing to look at except this manna."

Jon: Mmm. The bread's getting old.

Tim: Yeah. I mean, it's new every day, but it—

[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But it's getting old. Yeah. Numbers 12 is where Moses—it's a sibling rivalry story. It's where Moses' brother and sister start to question Moses' status and say like: "Man, are you really the only one God can use to lead this people and speak to us?"

Jon: Hmm. That's the third story?

Tim: Third story. The fourth story is where Moses and the people send this 12 spies into the land—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And they see the giants—

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: In the land. And so the spies come back and they're like—

Jon: "Nope."

Tim: "Nope, we're not doing it. Let's go back to Egypt." They see war.

[Laughter]

Tim: They see the—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Threat of war.

Jon: Yeah. War or leeks?

Tim: Oh, good—

[Laughter]

Tim: Okay. So actually, we're back to that moment where they go into the land—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And they see, not the Philistines—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But giants.

Jon: But giants, yeah.

Tim: And they see the threat of war.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So—

Jon: And they're still not ready for it.

Tim: No, and they say they want to kill Moses and go back—

[Laughter]

Jon: Oh, gosh.

Tim: Go back to Egypt.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So I think the point here is: "Oh my gosh, nothing's changed."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Like, this journey in the wilderness has not changed them. They're not ready to go into the land. And so this story is where God—wh—the way that he responds is: "How long—"this is in Numbers 14, God says: "How long will these people despise me? How long until they trust in me?" So God says: "Because all of you spies—you have seen my glory, you've seen the signs I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet these 10 times you've tested me and you haven't listened to my voice." An—what's interesting is there haven't been 10 testing stories yet.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: There's been seven.

Jon: There's been seven.

Tim: Yeah. But there are three more—

Jon: To come.

Tim: To come.

Jon: In the scroll of numbers?

Tim: So the—yeah. So there will be 10 total—

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: But it hasn't happened yet—

[Laughter]

Jon: Oh.

Tim: In narrative time.

[Laughter]

Jon: Oh, interesting.

Tim: So these seven testing stories are arranged in a chiasm, in a symmetry.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And the spies is the center one, because here's what comes next. In Numbers 16 and 17 is another sibling rivalry. It's some Levites rebelling against Moses and Aaron. So this then matches Miriam and Aaron's rebellion against their brother.

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: Then, after that is the people complaining for water—

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Again. And it replays the water stories—both water stories of Exodus—all these hyperlinks. And then it's Moses, um, he's supposed to speak to a rock.

Jon: The first time he's supposed to strike the rock, he does it. This time he's supposed to speak to the rock—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And he strikes it.

Tim: And he strikes it two times.

Jon: There's a whole puzzle there.

Tim: A whole th—interesting thing going on there. The last seventh story is the people grumble. And this is where the snakes—

Jon: Oh, yeah. Okay.

Tim: Come out of the wilderness and start biting—

Jon: And they make the—

Tim: People.

Jon: The bronze staff.

Tim: Yeah. And so Moses makes a bronze snake.

Jon: Okay. So seven stories. The center story is the spies going into the land.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: How do you get to 10?

Tim: 10 is, you take the three from Exodus—

Jon: Three from Exodus that we just read.

Tim: And you take the seven right here in Numbers—

Jon: Oh. And then—

Tim: You add them all up.

Jon: You get to 10.

Tim: And then just 10 separate stories.

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: And that's what God's referring to—

Jon: It's the 10 tests.

Tim: "They've tested me 10 times."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But the 10 tests—

[Laughter]

Tim: In narrative time, haven't happened yet.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: It's a good example of how—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: You're supposed to read this collection symmetrically. And so the middle story—

Jon: Oh—

Tim: Can refer to—

Jon: It's kind of the conclusion story.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: It's so interesting how that happens.

Tim: It's a contradiction on the level of literal, narrative time.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But in terms of meditation-literature style—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That assumes you're viewing this as a block—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It's—makes perfect sense.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Isn't that great?

Jon: That is really great.

Tim: It's a good example of how the biblical authors mess with chronology to compose literary units according to other reasons than just chronological.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So the consequence is, the whole generation that were adults when they came out of Egypt, they're going to die. They're going to wander for 40 years, a year for each of the 40 days that the spies were in the land, and the children who the adults said: "Where—the giants are going to kill us and take our children as plunder." God says: "No, I'm going to lead those children into the land and they'll get the land that you rejected." So these are the wilderness tests.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It doesn't go well.

Jon: It doesn't work.

Tim: It's Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel all over again. The people never—they don't change in the wilderness.

Jon: Hmm. Well, that's a bummer.

[Laughter]

Tim: It totally—it totally is. Yeah. And what's interesting is God's responses in the three tests before Mount Sinai was really patient.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: He did say like: "When are these people ever going to trust me?" But he gives them another chance. Here on the other side of Mount Sinai—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It gets pretty severe.

Jon: Yeah, the snakes—

Tim: Snakes, fire, lightning—

Jon: Earthquakes—

Tim: Earthquakes.

Jon: And it's—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And what's changed? Well, he gave them his own presence—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: In, like, the marriage covenant and the whole thing at Mount Sinai. It's like—

Tim: Oh—

Jon: The garden is going to come down to them—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: All this.

Tim: That's great.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So instead of them going back into the garden, they're not ready for it. But the garden presence of God did come take up residence—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: In their midst, and it's dangerous. It's God's dangerous holiness.

Jon: Yeah. Stakes are raised.

Tim: The stakes are raised. Yeah.

Jon: You grumble now. It's like—

Tim: You are cutting yourself off from your source of life.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: You're rejecting the only thing that's keeping you alive.

Jon: The closer you get back to the tree of life, to the garden, the less room there is to kind of buck against God's wisdom.

Tim: Oh, that's good. Yeah. That's right. Yeah. We're back to that paradox of: The closer you get to the source of life, the more intense are the stakes—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Are, are the consequences—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Are the—the crisis becomes more intense.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: There's a lot at stake in whether or not humans image God well and trust in him. And again, you can hear it in God's response. Like: "How long?" Like: "These people have seen my very presence in the midst of their camp. They saw everything I did to Egypt."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So that's a dynamic here, too.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "We've built this relationship, and you still don't trust me." And not just: "They don't trust me," they're trying to undo what God did by killing Moses and going back to Egypt.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. This is a downer moment. This is the moment that's recalled in the Prophets and the Psalms.

Jon: Grumbings in the wilderness.

Tim: Yeah. So thinking forward, there's whole Psalms dedicated to retelling the wilderness moments: Psalm 78, Psalm 106, Psalm 95. And this was a—clearly a defining moment in Israel's memory that the biblical authors—not only do they not want future generations to forget what happened in the wilderness, but they've shaped the stories so that they are *torah*, they're instruction. They're trying to give us insight into human nature and the opportunity in front of us, what God wants for us, and how we're like our own worst enemy. But when there's not enough and when there's—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: When there's too much.

Jon: Right. Yeah.

Tim: I guess we don't need to end this conversation on a—

Jon: No.

Tim: On a bright note if the story is trying to get us to stare at something that's not very happy.

Jon: Oh, but what is unsettling about it is we started with this sense of: "Well, if God just brings them on a journey—"

Tim: Oh, yeah.

Jon: "Teaches them what they need to do—"

[Laughter]

Jon: "They can be ready."

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And—

[Laughter]

Jon: That balloon was popped.

Tim: Yeah, it was. Yeah. Totally. So I guess we're to the point in the story where the complex, sad reality of human nature is on full display in the biblical authors. And that is a really important mirror to stare at a lot—

[Laughter]

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: As we read through Scripture. And it is going to send, in bright relief, the promise of the prophets of a day when the hearts—God will change the hearts of

his people. He will take out the heart of stone and put in the f—the soft, fleshy heart that will listen to God’s instruction. That’s Ezekiel’s—he says that’s the only solution.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And o—then of course, Jesus goes into the wilderness for 40 days and goes through his wilderness test. He succeeds. He’s the Israelite who succeeds where his ancestors failed.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And so that is a moment of ultimate victory. And we’ll get there in this series. But I think for now we—it’s just good to sit in the discomfort of—

[Laughter]

Tim: This realistic depiction of, of our own human nature.

Jon: Hmm.

[Musical Break (59:43—59:47)]

Jon: Thanks for listening to this episode of BibleProject podcast. Next week, we’re going to look at Deuteronomy eight, where Moses prepares Israel to enter the garden-land. It’s a warning.

Tim: For a heart that is not trained to view every moment of goodness as a sheer gift from God, then, there can be such a thing as too much goodness that will deceive your heart and take you places you do not want to go. And in that case, the garden-land can actually be the worst possible thing that could happen to a person.

Jon: BibleProject is a crowdfunded nonprofit, and we exist to help people experience the Bible as a unified story that leads to Jesus. And everything that we make is free because of the generosity of thousands of people just like you. Thank you so much for being a part of this with us.

Liam: Hi, my name is Liam, and I'm from Bourbonnais, Illinois.

Zala: Hi, my name is Zala, and I'm from Slovenia. I first heard about the BibleProject even before it was the BibleProject. Tim used to do "Bible in 5," in front of the window, explaining every book of the Bible.

Liam: I first heard about the BibleProject on YouTube, and I use BibleProject for getting ready for the morning as I listen to podcasts from all of the great series.

Zala: My favorite thing about the BibleProject is that it brings clarity and the big picture—

Liam: That they make all of these resources available to us for free, and the significant impact that they have had on my life. We believe the Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus.

Zala: BibleProject is a nonprofit funded by people like me.

Liam: Find free videos, articles, podcasts—

Zala: Classes, and more on the BibleProject app—

Liam: And at BibleProject.com.

Johanna: Hi, my name is Johanna, and I'm on the finance team, where I handle the logistics of our merchandise and distribution. I've been working at BibleProject for three years, and one of my favorite parts of working here is the culture and community. There is a whole team of people that make the podcast come to life every week. For a full list of everyone who's involved, check out the end of the episode and the show credits wherever you stream the podcast and on our app.