



Lesson 2

Hearts in the Wilderness

Deuteronomy 8; Matthew 4; Numbers 11

Tested through temptation to see if we will obey God from the heart

Summary

The wilderness is a hard place and a testing place; but it is a transforming place. Through the situations of life, God's providences are designed to give us opportunities to obey Him from the heart or to expose a sinful heart.

TEACHER: Use an illustration about a practical hands on test that shows whether or not one actually has the skill. You may also want to use an illustration where a test shows what something is actually made of, a litmus test, etc.

Other texts to consider:

James 1:12-25

Heart **E x p o s i n g** Work of the Wilderness Deuteronomy 8

Background: Deuteronomy is three messages preached by Moses just before dying. In these messages he applies the Law and interprets their wilderness experience calling on them to obey the Lord. Verse 1 reiterates the command/blessing system they lived under.

God's Providences in L e a d i n g Them (v.2a)

God has led them through the whole wilderness experience. This has been 40 years of chastening due to their disobedience at Kadesh-Barnea. They must understand that the hardships they have experienced are in God's control.

So must we. God is in control of our own wilderness experience. If we are going to have a transforming work done in our hearts, we must believe in the sovereign power and providence of God.

God's Purpose to H u m b l e Them (v.2b)

God's primary aim is to humble His people. He is at work to expose our sin and to humble our pride. He will do whatever it takes to accomplish this aim. God will work to undercut boasting in anything except Himself.



God's Program to E x p o s e Them (v.2c)

God was at work to test them, to expose whether they would obey Him from the heart.

The testing involves measuring their o b e d i e n c e.

Will God's people obey Him regardless of the circumstances? What does it take to get a person to disobey God?

The testing involves exposing their h e a r t s.

God is testing the heart as the root and source of obedience. The sense here is that the outward match inward.

God's Provisions to T e s t Them (v.3-4)

God has done three important things to test their obedience and their hearts.

Brought them through humbling c i r c u m s t a n c e s.

God humbles His people through their situations and their sins.

He is exposing and transforming a heart full of pride and self-congratulation.

Allowed them to suffer in the lack of b a s i c n e e d s.

God allows them to go hungry to see what they really crave for.

He is exposing and transforming a heart focused on the things of this world.

P r o v i d e d for them in supernatural ways.

God provides them supernatural bread and sustains shoes and clothing.

He is exposing and transforming a heart that takes God for granted.

Taught them the importance of the W o r d o f G o d for daily living.

God's people must learn that the Word of God is their daily food, more important even than physical food.

God's Principles to G u i d e Them (v.5-7ff)

What must we know so as to profit from this obedience testing heart exposing work?

Accept God's paternal c h i l d - t r a i n i n g. (v.5)

God is doing this as a wise and diligent father. It is chastening in the best and broadest sense. He is not punishing us as a severe judge. He is transforming and training us as a good Father.



W a l k in God's ways with holy fear. (v.6)

God delights in an obedience in relationship. This phrase "walk in God's ways" calls us to more than just doing what He says. It draws and demands that we obey and submit with joy in the context of fellowship (1 John 1).

God delights in an obedience with reverence. Obedience from the heart is one that is informed and inspired by an awe and respect for God.

Expect God's b l e s s i n g in His own time and way.(V.7-10)

God's blessings cannot be demanded. The testing work of the wilderness is designed to weed out demanding hearts that carp and complain.

God's promises will be fulfilled. Make no mistake, He will accomplish what He promises. The ultimate fulfillment will be grander than we can possibly imagine.

God's Precept to W a r n Them (v.11-16)

Their hearts are to be organized by remembering what they have been taught and desiring the good the God brings. God's method is to do this through a series of warnings.

Lest we f o r g e t God in the midst of plenty. (v.11-16)

A heart satiated with the blessings of God may turn away from being satisfied with God Himself. The good that God does for us may be forgotten with the effect that we turn away in our hearts from God.

Lest we d e c e i v e ourselves in the midst of pride(v.17-20)

A heart speaking lies to itself needs to remember truth, repent of sin and return to the Lord.

Notice here how the words remember, forget and say are all heart functions with grave or good consequences.



Heart C o n f i r m i n g Work of the Wilderness **Matthew 4**

Matthew structures this section of his book to show that Jesus is the new Israel of God. He is the out of Egypt called son, baptized, pleasing to God and now tested in the wilderness.

A p p r o v e d by God (3:17)

At the end of the baptism, the Holy Spirit descends like a dove and the Father speaks. In the Father's speech, Jesus is approved by God.

I n H i s I d e n t i t y

The Father declares that Jesus is the Son of God. His identity is established. This is parallel to Deuteronomy 7.

I n H i s P u r i t y

The Father is pleased with Jesus. God delights in Christ.

L e d by the Spirit (4:1)

God is taking Jesus into the wilderness to test Him by exposing Him to Satan's temptations. Through the temptation, Jesus' identity and purity will be challenged.

F o l l o w s the P l a n of God

Jesus' going into the wilderness follows the plan of God. This is not an accident. It is in accordance with the types in the Old Testament and with what the Scriptures declare.

S e r v e s the P u r p o s e s of God

Jesus is led into the wilderness in order to be tested and tried. God's purpose is to vindicate Jesus' identity and purity through this testing.

W e a k e n e d by the Fasting (v.2)

It is almost certain that this is a religious exercise. He is fasting, not simply because there is no food, but because he has intentionally chosen not to eat.

Physical weakness is often the situation in which Satan will tempt us. It has the effect of heightening the physical temptations and weakening our spiritual resolve.



T e m p t e d by the Devil (v.3-10)

The temptation is testing to see whether Jesus will obey God from the heart. Like Eve, He is tempted directly. Like Israel, He is tested to expose and exhibit what is in His heart. The Word of God is the bulls-eye in each of these temptations and all the testing.

The temptations are designed to challenge the identity of Christ. “If you are the Son of God” then you ought to be able to do these things. It has the “Come on, prove yourself” effect.

In the Pressing N e e d s of the Body (v.3-5)

Jesus is hungry. The body surely is craving food. But the right, natural desires of the body, even at the “craving” level, do not excuse sin. Satan’s temptation frames heart issues for our own temptations:

To exercise His creative power to s e r v e H i m s e l f.

His Divine power is not for His own, personal use. It is always to be subjected to the will of God, His Father.

To be i m p a t i e n t for the will of God

God will provide for Jesus in His own time. While Jesus may have the ability to do what Satan is suggesting, it is not the time now. He will wait on God.

To heed the forceful c o m m a n d s of the tempter

Satan offers this first temptation as an imperative. It is spoken as a command. It is meant to see if Jesus will obey Satan to satisfy His body.

To succumb to the d e m a n d s of the body.

The wants, needs and even cravings of the body are to be in submission to the Word and the will of God.

Jesus’ response in quoting from Deuteronomy 8 is not just an answer to turning stones into bread to satisfy His hunger. It tells us what is actually going on here. He connects His own experience with that of Israel. The wilderness with its hunger is a place to hear and heed the Word of God.

In the Presumptive Misuse of the S c r i p t u r e s (v.6-7)

In this temptation, Satan takes Jesus up to the Temple and then, quoting a part of Psalm 91:9-13. Satan tempts Jesus in two significant areas.

By changing the m e a n i n g of the text (Psalm 91:9-13)

Satan is changing what the text means – the dwelling place of the Most high is not the building made with hands but the eternal habitation of God who is first the Lord Jesus and the heavenly city of Zion.



By seeking to t e s t God

It is not faith to put oneself in unnecessary danger in order to see if God will do what He says. It is presumption, even in the promises of God, to take risks solely to prove that God will keep His Word.

By attempting to e n d Jesus' life early

Satan does not believe that Jesus will be rescued. He thinks that if Jesus does this, then he will probably die. This is another attempt to destroy Jesus before He actually gets to the cross.

In the Perverted Worship of the Lord (v.8-10)

Satan tempts in three critical areas:

By offering p l e a s u r e now instead of the pain now.

Jesus would be responding to the immediate gratification offered by Satan. Is Jesus willing to wait on God's time for the public acknowledgment and acceptance of the Kingdom? This is an issue of the cross. Why not receive all that was promised without having the pain and suffering entailed?

By making p r o m i s e s he cannot and will not keep.

Jesus would be recognizing the illegitimate authority of Satan. Satan has no authority to do this, even as the prince and power of the air.

By eliciting p r a i s e he does not deserve or is entitled to.

Jesus would be reverencing Satan instead of worshipping God.

**Complaining from a D i s t o r t e d Heart
Numbers 11**

How many of you have gone to a doctor and asked for help with being addicted to grumbling? Do you attend Grumblers Anonymous?

The aim of this text is to show the direct effect of sinful beliefs and wants as it emerges in complaining about the difficulties of life. This is developed by material from Dr. Robert Jones and Dr. David Powlison.

U n c e r t a i n t y and Danger Numbers 11:1-3

This short cameo provides the structure to think through Israel' as complaining and grumbling before the Lord.

Situation – what is their life like?

Adversity and difficult y of the desert



Response – what do they do and feel?

Complain about their misfortunes

H e a r t I s s u e s – what is in their hearts?

Don't believe God's promises

Don't want hardships, won't submit with joy to difficulties

Consequences – what is the result?

Lord's anger and Judgment of fire around the outskirts of the camp

Provisions – how does God provide?

Moses who believes God's promises and intercedes

Mediator who stands between God's wrath and the sinner.

B o r e d o m and Sameness

Numbers 11:4-35

Moses highlights how the heart is driving their complaining about God's supernatural provision for them (v.4).

Situation – what is p r o v o k i n g their heart?

Same old food over and over again, tasteless manna

Response – what do they do and feel?

They weep, complain, unfavorably contrast their present and past circumstances, diminish the difficulties of the past, and exaggerate the pleasures of Egypt and the pains of the present.

Teacher: draw out the tendencies in each of these responses and relate them to how we tend to do this as well.



Heart Issues – what are they s a y i n g to themselves?

Not speaking truth to themselves: Distorted view of Egypt's pleasures and a selective memory of Egypt's hardships

"craved a craving" – sinful craving for Egypt's varied and flavorful foods.

Consequences – what happened as a result?

Displeasure of their spiritual leadership tempting him to sin

Anger of the Lord against their sin

Failed the test of the quail

Sickened by a plague

Provisions – how did God d e a l with them?

Teaches them contentment by sickening satiation of their craving for meat.

Chastens them to prune and to purify

Stress and Demands

Numbers 11:10-30

Israel's sin is contagious – Moses now complains about his own lot.

Situation – what is the m e a n s of temptation?

The complaining of Israel and the righteous anger of the Lord

Response – how does he e x p e r i e n c e this and e x p r e s s himself?

Experience (feel) – frustrated, angry, overwhelmed, can't win

Express (say, do) – complains to about God, the people and his responsibilities.

Heart Issues – how does he v i e w his situation?

Questions God's wisdom and goodness in giving him the job.



Sees himself as an overburdened parent with bad kids.
Says that the burden and responsibility is too great.
Agrees with the people's assessment of the problem (get meat)
Wants to escape so badly asks God to kill him (suicidal thoughts)
Craves an easy ministry and good people

Consequences – how does God deal with him?

Speaks to him to instruct his heart and re-organize his thinking
Sanctions the leaders he should have been helped by all along

Provisions – what has God provided for Moses?

God affirms the necessity of a plurality of leadership
God enables the leaders by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit
God humbles Moses to recognize the equal work of the Spirit

Principle: God may in a single set of circumstances be testing different people in different ways.

The situation here exposes Israel's dissatisfaction with God's provision and Moses' dissatisfaction with God's people. The very same situation is being managed by the exquisite wisdom of God to expose very different heart issues. Help the class to recognize this in all relational dynamics: home, school, work and church.



Lessons for Living

God is at work to e x p o s e what is in your heart.

He will bring particular times of testing, trial and temptation to show you what is going on in your inner man.

Your heart exerts an inescapable c o n t r o l over your behavior – your actions and emotions.

You live out of the flow of words in your heart. You do and feel what you believe and want. *Teacher:* illustrate this with an example of wanting, denied and anger, frustration, etc resulting.

P h y s i c a l weakness and vulnerability are special times of testing and temptation for our good.

Our sin is not excused in these times. If anything, we are more accountable because God is doing an intentional work.

Complaining is both a s i n and a s y m p t o m.

Like communication problems, complaining is an expression of a dissatisfied heart, one dissatisfied with God's providences and provisions, and thus with God.

There is neither t a s k nor t r i a l too great for us to bear; God has made provision for them both.

Israel's troubles in the wilderness and Moses' tasks as leader are carefully weighed out by God to be exactly what is needed. The experience of life as boring and overwhelming expose that our hearts are not organized nor oriented by God's Word.

It is important to note that Israel does not want manna because of what they believe about Egypt. Moses struggles with craving a different kind of ministry or people than God gave him partially because he has refused to recognize the proper role of the elders in Israel, despite Jethro's counsel earlier. This *already exists in their hearts before the situation which exposes it.*



Our great and merciful High Priest has been t e m p t e d just as we are and is able to come to our aid.

Matthew 4 and Hebrews 4 ought to motivate us to come to Christ for help.

Questions for Discussion

What is God doing in the wilderness?

Why does God test us?

How do these categories of temptation come to us?

What is the focus of Satan's temptation? What is he challenging?

What are the implications for us when the occasion for Jesus' testing is an issue of the body?

How does Jesus respond to every temptation? Why?

What is going on in your life that is like Numbers 11?

How does Jesus provide you help in times of need?



Notes