

# THE PURPOSE OF TESTING #10

## Testing in the Wilderness

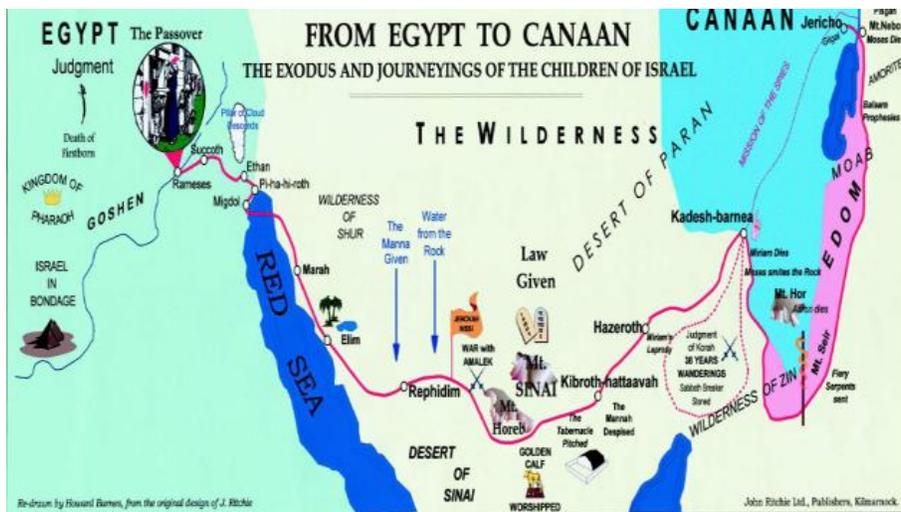
### I. Introduction

This is our 10<sup>th</sup> teaching in in our series on “The Purpose of Testing”.

We have taught that testing, trials and troubles are unavoidable; but God has a purpose for every test that He allows into our lives. Tonight I want to teach on the spiritual principle of “testing in the wilderness”.

### A. Terminology Taken From the Old Testament

1. The terminology of our title is taken from the Old Testament account of how God saved His people Israel out of Egyptian bondage and brought them into the Land He had promised their forefathers.



a. The physical geography of the journey shows movement west to east (moving toward the rising Sun?); notice that the only way to get from Egypt (on the left) to the Promised Land (on the right) was *through the wilderness*.

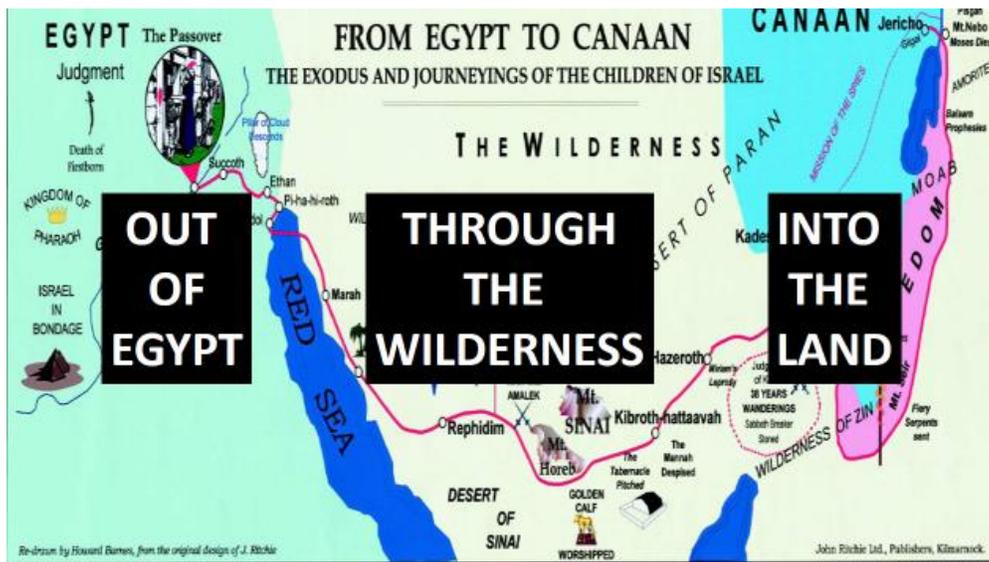
2. Why is this so important? Because the Apostle Paul tells New Testament Christians to study the Exodus of Israel because what happened to them is *a physical picture of our spiritual journey with Jesus*.

## 1 Corinthians 10:11

**Now all these things happened to them (Israel) as examples, (types) written for our admonition (instruction), upon whom the ends of the ages have come.**

3. Paul says to study the Old Testament Exodus of Israel because it is an instruction book for New Testament salvation; a physical picture that illustrates spiritual truth!

4. Notice are 3 parts to the panorama: God brings Israel out of Egypt, leads them through a wilderness, and takes them into the Land He promised them.



5. This corresponds to Christian salvation:

- a. God saves us out of Egypt (the world) by the blood of the Lamb
- b. To take us into the full provision of all He has promised us.
- c. But between the Promise and the Provision there is a Problem; there is a “wilderness”.

6. In the same way Israel could not get from Egypt to the Promised Land without going through the wilderness, so we cannot be saved out of the world and come into the fullness of our inheritance without passing through a spiritual version of wilderness! American poet Annie Dillard said it this way....

**Annie Dillard**

**“No one escapes passing through the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land”.**

(So what is the meaning of the wilderness?)

## 7. **The wilderness is a physical expression of a spiritual truth!**

- It is a place of *transition*: (not our permanent placement); it is not Egypt; but it is not the Promised Land; we are saved but not yet walking in all we know God has for us
- It is a place of *preparation*: God appointed a wilderness to prepare men like Moses, David, and John the Baptist for their destinies. The Promised Land was ready for Israel but Israel was not ready for the Promised Land. A season of preparation was required.
- It is a place of *education*: God has appointed us to go through the wilderness to teach us one great lesson on...

### **B. Why Do We Need the Wilderness?**

#### **Theme**

**The wilderness is where God brings us to the end of ourselves;  
It is the school where we learn to totally depend upon Him.**

1. The purpose of the wilderness is to cut us off from dependence upon our flesh and bring us into a total dependence upon God.

2. The wilderness is designed to deal with the one great sin that separated the human race from God...

#### **Derek Prince**

**The root error of Adam and Eve was to be like God without depending on God. This is the sin of independence.**

3. This great sin still stalks us even after we are saved; but God delivers us from it by leading us into a wilderness where there is no help from any hand but His!

a. The Apostle Paul said...

**For we walk by faith and not by sight.  
2 Corinthians 5:7**

4. Unfortunately, many of us get it backwards! We walk by sight and not by faith. We are ruled by our feelings. We tend to be happy or sad according to our circumstances. God's cure for that condition awaits us in the wilderness.

a. Even though they were enslaved in Egypt, God's people had everything they needed at hand; they had houses, food on the table, and a very predictable lifestyle.

b. Israel had no revelation of the greatness of the God who brought them out of Egypt; the only way they could really know Him was to be put in a place where He was all they had!

5. Few men had a greater revelation of the wilderness than the late...

**T. Austin Sparks**

**“The wilderness is a dry, barren place, where you cannot see anything or feel anything; where if your only resources were in your senses you are at an utter end. It is a barren place of utter dependence upon God, and there is nothing else to depend upon. This is a vital factor for obtaining the inheritance.”**

6. God has so much for us in our personal Promised Land, which is our rightful inheritance. Our problem is we aren't ready to handle it. The Promised Land was prepared for Israel; but Israel was not prepared for the Promised Land.

7. Sad to say so many of us never know the purpose of God when He leads us into the wilderness!

**T. Austin Sparks**

**“God is shutting you up to exclusion in that barren place where He can be your life and you have to depend upon Him for everything; thus you come into your inheritance, which is the Lord Himself. It is utter separation from all and everything unto God.”**

a. A Nigerian Christian motivational speaker says it this way....

**Frank Done**

**“Testing in the wilderness is an unavoidable experience that demonstrates our loyalty and faith to the Almighty God. The wilderness is a preparation time—40 years or 40 days.”**

8. Jesus was in the wilderness of testing 40 days; Israel 40 years. So the question arises...

**C. Why So Long in the Wilderness?**

1. God brought Israel out of Egypt to take them into the Promised Land; in between was a wilderness they should have crossed in 11 days...

**Deuteronomy 8:2**

**It is eleven day's journey from Horeb to Kadesh-Barnea.**

a. But they wandered in the wilderness for 4 decades!

**Deuteronomy 1:2**

**You shall remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness.**

2. Why did it take so long?

**Deuteronomy 8:2**

**And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.**

a. God is the one who leads us into the wilderness!

b. The purpose? To humble us and test us-to bring us to the end of ourselves and test our response to a condition of helplessness.

c. "To know what was in your heart"-not for God to know! He already knows what's in our heart! The problem is that WE do not know what's in our hearts until we come to the end of all our own strength in the flesh!

3. The next verse is an example of how He does it. He let them run out of food!

**Deuteronomy 8:3**

**So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.**

4. Does this remind you of something Jesus said? It should!

a. In Matthew chapter 3, Jesus is baptized by John to begin His earthly ministry...

**Matt 3:16-17**

**When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."**

b. The Father sets His heavenly seal upon His son so He can enter His ministry; but not right away! The next verse says...

**Matthew 4:1**

**Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.**

**Mark 4:12**

***Immediately* the Spirit *drove* Him into the wilderness. And He was there 40 days tempted by Satan...**

c. Amazing! The same God who led Israel into the wilderness now leads Jesus into the wilderness.

d. *Even Jesus* could not enter into the fullness of His ministry without going through the wilderness of testing!

**Matthew 4:2-3**

**And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, *afterward He was hungry.* Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."**

e. Many miss the message here; Jesus is in the wilderness; He has had no food for 40 days; He was weakened, hungry; and there was no food in sight anywhere. And what was the test? "If YOU are the Son of God turn these stones to bread. Use your own power and strength to meet your needs."

f. But NO, Jesus will not do it. Instead, He quotes the very verse God spoke to Israel...

**Matthew 4:4**

**But He answered and said, 'As it is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'**

g. The first test of faith is to come to the end of human strength; to know that man does not live by depending on the flesh but on the Word of God!

5. Jesus modeled the message of the wilderness; in the wilderness, at the end of human strength and all His own resources, He declared His total faith in God to meet His need!

a. It took 40 days to come to this end; but when He did He came out very soon.

#### **T. Austin Sparks**

**“The duration of the wilderness depends upon our maturity in the knowledge of the Lord, until He becomes and is our ‘all in all’. He Himself! When He has His place we come into our large place, which is on the ground of our personal knowing in a very real way, the Lord Himself as our all. Conquest depends upon this knowledge of the Lord.”**

6. The wilderness is God’s idea not man’s idea. If it were up to us we would skip it and short cut into our Promised Land. But God’s way is the right way; the place we come to know who we really are and who God really is.

#### **T. Austin Sparks**

**“In the wilderness the whole of our natural life is brought out. We come to know our weakness and emptiness; that we have nothing. Thus we find everything in Christ and so can go over and possess. The secret of possession and coming into our inheritance is coming to the place where all things are ‘in Christ’ and He is everything—our very life and being. Our flesh is cut off and we know as the deepest thing in our being that unless God does everything in us by His Spirit, that all is of no value. *We must come to the end of our own working in order to come into His fullness.*”**

a. Notice: we never truly come to the fullness of God until we come the emptiness of our own flesh.

b. The sum of what we are saying.

**The wilderness is where God brings us to the end of ourselves so that we totally depend upon Him.**

### **III. Close**

#### **A. The Lord is With Us in the Wilderness**

1. Jesus is Lord of all; in Egypt, in the wilderness, as well as in the Promised Land; He may have us “on hold” in the wilderness of testing; but He has a purpose for it.

**T. Austin Sparks**

***“The Lord sovereignly held the children of Israel in the wilderness, while the testing and training was going on, the preparation for the inheritance, and He is holding you while He does the same. You are the prisoner of the Lord, hedged in unto His Divine completeness. The Lord is sovereignly holding us and getting us through; the credit is not ours, but His. It is all grace!”***

2. Don’t worry what the world thinks of you in your hard times!

Pharaoh said, “they are entangled in the land; the wilderness has shut them in”.  
(Exodus 14:3)

**T. Austin Sparks**

**“But God had shut them in; to a place of imprisonment where they come out wholly for the Lord. The Lord has imprisoned you, and you cannot run away. There are sometimes fiery trials, and Satan says, ‘Quit! Quit!’ But you know you cannot.**

**T. Austin Sparks**

**“The flesh would love to be released and find a way out, but you know you’ve got to go through, and He is holding you. If He had not held you, where would you have been? We would kick and run away; only He holds and will hold until He has done the work, and you will say, ‘The Lord did it!’ You are hedged in by Divine compulsion.”**

3. The Lord is with us in the wilderness; because we are His people; His portion; His inheritance!

**Deuteronomy 32:9-10**

**For the Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance. He found him in a desert land and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye.**

**Pastor Tony Evans**

**“The purpose of the wilderness is for God to show you He is God.”**