

MOSES

A Man of Selfless Dedication

STUDY THIRTEEN

A Heavenly Diet vs. An Earthly Appetite

Exodus 16–17

Our heavenly Father takes us through wilderness experiences to keep us trusting in Him.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IF you could choose your life's course, which one would you choose—the rocky course or the smooth? Silly question, isn't it? Who wouldn't choose the smooth path?

No potholes on this preferred path. No jagged rocks. No steep hills to climb. No blazing sun or searing wind. Only meadows with green grass underfoot, trees for shade, and soft breezes to cool the brow.

The easygoing, problem-free life sounds inviting. No worries about money . . . no hassles with the kids . . . no headaches at work. No stress, no friction, no pain . . . and no *growth*.

That's right. Without hardship, we don't develop character or learn wisdom, and we certainly don't grow in faith. How would we know that God is sufficient to meet our needs if we never had any needs for Him to meet?

On the smooth path, we don't depend on God, and so we don't grow close to Him. On the rocky path, however, we need Him constantly, and so we come to know Him intimately.

Which trail sounds better now?

In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we follow the Israelites into the wilderness. Along the way, they discover attributes of God they never would have discovered on the easy road. Will it be challenging? Will they experience starvation? Dehydration? Pain? Will they wish they could go anywhere but this desert, even back to Egypt? Yes, but they will also experience God, and so will we. That's what makes journeys in the wilderness worthwhile.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

The Lord “revealed his character to Moses” in the wilderness (Psalm 103:7). Invite Him to give you a glimpse of His character and truth through His Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

After the Lord brought the Israelites through the Red Sea, they celebrated God’s deliverance in a jubilant song. Moses led the people in worship, and his sister, Miriam, led the women in dancing and praising:

*“Sing to the LORD,
for he has triumphed gloriously;
he has hurled both horse and rider
into the sea.” (Exodus 15:21)*

With celebration in their hearts, the Israelites moved south toward Mount Sinai. Where did Moses take the people in [Exodus 15:22](#)? What new crisis occurred?

How quickly the sight of the Red Sea faded in the distance. Would the Israelites’ faith also fade as the people moved into the daily grind of depending on God for sustenance? Let’s find out.



Observation: Tests in the Wilderness

In *observation*, we sometimes discover repeating patterns.¹ In the passages for this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, a cycle emerges.

First, God performed a miracle, like the Red Sea miracle, and the Israelites reveled in God’s *abundance* as they fixed their gaze on the Lord and His power. Second, they *expected* His abundance to continue as they looked ahead to the next destination.

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Inevitably, however, a crisis occurred, and their eyes shifted to their circumstances. As a result, third, *disappointment* set in. Fourth, they *complained* when they started looking back on better times and missing the old days; and fifth, God miraculously *provided* for their need and delivered them. And then the cycle started over again.

Abundance, expectation, disappointment, complaint, provision. Let's chart this pattern in three faith tests that the Israelites encountered in the wilderness. Each test included a spiritual lesson which we'll examine in more detail in the *interpretation* phase.

The Israelites made history for our benefit. They went through some tests and failed, and God recorded it in the Bible so that we might learn.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Bitterness at Marah—Exodus 15:22–27

The Israelites basked in God's *abundance* after He delivered them at the Red Sea. What do you think was their *expectation* as they traveled three days into the desert of Shur?

Read the verses in each column and record the people's *disappointment, complaint,* and the Lord's *provision.*

Test One: Bitter Water <i>Exodus 15:22–27</i>	
Disappointment and Complaint <i>Exodus 15:22–24</i>	Provision <i>Exodus 15:25–27</i>

Take away the tests and we become spiritually lazy. But put us in a time of testing, and it's remarkable how we grow. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Grumbling in the Wilderness of Sin—Exodus 16:1–30

The refreshing oasis of Elim gave the people plenty of time to rest in God’s gracious *abundance*.

What do you think was the people’s *expectation* after Elim?

Read the verses in each column and record the people’s *disappointment*, *complaint*, and the Lord’s *provision* when they left Elim for the wilderness of Sin.

Test Two: Hunger <i>Exodus 16:1–30</i>	
Disappointment and Complaint <i>Exodus 16:1–3</i>	Provision <i>Exodus 16:4–15</i>

Read God’s extensive instructions for collecting manna for a day and for the Sabbath in *Exodus 16:16–30*. Summarize what you observe, and we’ll examine the meaning later.

Why does God put us through wilderness experiences before taking us to heaven? Because He wants to test us. Let’s face it, our roots grow deep when the winds are strong. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Hostility at Rephidim—Exodus 17:1–7

The Lord’s *abundance* of food encouraged the people as they “left the wilderness of Sin and moved from place to place” (Exodus 17:1). What do you think they *expected* to find at their next campsite at Rephidim?

Read the verses in each column and record the people’s *disappointment*, *complaint*, and the Lord’s *provision* at Rephidim.

Test Three: Thirst <i>Exodus 17:1–7</i>	
Disappointment and Complaint <i>Exodus 17:1–4</i>	Provision <i>Exodus 17:5–7</i>

Remarkable, isn’t it? The Israelites had seen God open the Red Sea, turn bitter water to sweet, and fill their stomachs with daily bread. Surely, they could trust God to supply water at Rephidim, right? No, they couldn’t. Instead of lifting their hands toward heaven, they reached for stones to throw at Moses! They hadn’t learned anything. Let’s see what beautiful truths they missed.

If you focus on the past, then you will start complaining before long. You will remember when things were easier than it is today, and you will grumble.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Interpretation: Who God Is and How We Relate to Him

Think back to the incident at Marah. In *Exodus 15:26*, how did God say He desires His people to relate to Him? Embedded in this lesson is an attribute of God. Why is this attribute the key to the lesson?

The bitter water of unbelief gives us a bad case of grumbling. How can the Lord heal our hearts from this poison? What did God want the sweet water to represent?

Moving on to the wilderness of Sin, God miraculously provided manna and meat in abundance. In *Exodus 16:16–30*, He instructed the Israelites to gather just enough manna for the day (daily bread) and, on the sixth day, to gather more for the Sabbath (weekly rest). What was God teaching His people about Himself through His provision?

What spiritual benefits do we glean from the *daily* and *weekly* routines of depending on God's sufficiency?

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At Rephidim, the Israelites did more than grumble. They became demanding, angry, and hostile. Their hearts turned as hard as the stones they almost threw at Moses. They had crossed the line and were “testing the LORD,” Moses said (Exodus 17:2). What does it mean to test the Lord? Why is testing the Lord such a serious sin?

When Pharaoh tested the Lord, Moses struck the Nile with God’s staff of judgment, turning the Nile to blood (7:14–19). At Rephidim, however, Moses struck the rock with God’s staff of *grace*, and a river of life-giving water gushed out.

What was God teaching His people about Himself and how to relate to Him?

Mull over the three wilderness tests and consider the faith lessons they taught. In the space below, summarize the timeless truths you’ve learned.



Correlation: Christ the Rock

The Israelites’ wilderness journey parallels our spiritual journey in many ways. At conversion, we go through a Red Sea experience when God rescues us from certain death and opens a way to new life through Christ our Savior. But the journey doesn’t end with conversion. Between the Red Sea and the promised land is the wilderness.

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Paul compared the Israelites' experience to ours in [1 Corinthians 10:1–4](#). How was their connection to Moses like our spiritual union with Christ?

Jesus is the source of God's grace through whom His water of life freely flows. How did Paul make this point in [10:4](#)? What does Paul's metaphor mean to you? See also [John 4:14](#) and [7:37–38](#).



Application: Wilderness Wisdom in Action

The wilderness is a place of testing. It reveals the focus of our faith. When our eyes are on the Lord, we are better able to trust His power, His promises, and His sufficiency. When we see nothing but our circumstances, however, we tend to do what the Israelites did. Grumble. Complain. Throw rocks. What can we learn from the Israelites' mistakes to help us avoid this pitfall? Let's glean two applications.

First, *their mistakes encourage us to practice the right things*. Make it a habit, for example, to be content with God's daily provisions and to rest in His sufficiency. What difference would this simple routine make in your walk with God?

Second, *their wanderings direct us to the right person*. Snapshots of Jesus Christ appear throughout our passage. He is the sweet water that heals our souls ([John 4:13–14](#)). He is the bread that comes down from heaven ([6:29–35](#)). He is the Rock that was struck so that we might have life ([1 Corinthians 10:4](#)).

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What image of Jesus means the most to you in your current situation?

Christ is your healer, your sustainer, and your provider as you sojourn through this world on your way to the next. He will take you through the wilderness. Trust in His sufficiency and keep His song of praise always on Your lips.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I must confess that when my eyes turn away from You, I grumble more than show gratitude. I protest rather than praise. I complain about what I don't have rather than be content with what You've provided. I long to rest in the refreshing sweetness of Your grace. Lord, keep my eyes fixed on You and Your sufficiency today and every day. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2024–2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1975, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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