

Dr. Elaine Phillips, Historical Geography--Lecture 6: Wilderness

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This is Dr. Elaine Phillips in her final lecture, lecture number six, Historical Geography and Introduction. Lecture number six will focus on the various wildernesses of Israel.

Okay, at this point we are going to address a whole different type of area that we haven't seen yet, that is the wilderness. Walter Brueggemann in some context that I can't remember has introduced a very important phrase that captures this nicely and that is: "having nothing, but lacking nothing." And that's what the wilderness experience is going to be about in many, many ways and at number of different levels.

So, here is some background information. First of all, here's what wilderness looks like and I'm showing this particularly because often times those of us who come from North America, in particular the northern part of North America, think of wilderness as lots and lots of trees and lakes and no roads, and bears and those kinds of things. When the biblical text uses "wilderness," a good synonym for it is going to be "desert." And this is a good look at one of the wilderness areas. Notice how vast it is. Notice that you could easily get lost in here. Some of us have done this. Notice that it is dry, it's barren and those are the pictures we want to have in our mind whenever we're thinking wilderness. This happens to be part of the Judean wilderness.

So, I mentioned a moment ago some of the conceptions that we have as we think wilderness. Let's run through them. When Israel was in the wilderness, and we're going to see there are a number of times when this happens, it's very often a time of testing for them. Likewise, when we think of this wilderness concept for ourselves, we have to use it as a metaphor for testing. So keep that in mind. I've already mentioned that "wilderness" there means "desert" and therefore those testings are often times that are spiritually dry and barren times. It's a metaphor

that works in that way as well. As you looked at that photograph one of the things that you saw was all kinds of undulating cliffs and so forth and so on. It is exceedingly easy to get lost in this area; if you just head up one of the wrong directions and wrong ridges, you can be way off base. And that, of course, has all sorts of spiritual overtones with it as well. The wilderness is vast and it does, of necessity, make us feel really small when we're out in it. It's also quiet, very quiet. All the distractions and noises that are around about us and the context in which we usually live, are gone. Therefore it has that aspect of it. That means that the wilderness can be an important place to meet God. And we're going to see the Israelites having both of these things: a place of testing but also a place of meeting God.

There isn't just one wilderness that the Israelites encountered. We'll look at a map and look at least five different wildernesses. Picking up on what I just said a moment ago, this is an ambiguous place. Let me just walk through what I mean here. First of all, this is a place of transition. The first wilderness that the Israelites encounter is after they leave their slavery and their bondage in Egypt when they've been subject to pharaoh and they're coming to the promised land. They spend lots and lots of time in the wilderness of Sinai and the wilderness of Paran and all those wildernesses. They even spend time in the wilderness before they get to Mount Sinai and establish the covenant with God. So it's a between place, it's a place of transition.

One of the things I suggested a moment ago in terms of meeting with God, wilderness does become a place of purification. It's a place of worship. In fact when Moses, speaking for God, first goes to pharaoh, he says "We want to go three days into the wilderness and worship." And they were not the only group of foreigners in Egypt that was doing that at that time. Other ethnic groups that were there, other Asiatics, also went off into the wilderness to do worship activities, so it wasn't a new thing. It was a place that was conceived of as being pure.

Having said all that, however, the wilderness was also a place where wild

animals were, and those often merged in the minds of people and mythology with demons. It therefore becomes a symbol; the wilderness becomes a symbol of desolation. That finds its way working out as the desert representing everything that's hostile. If you wanted to die, the place to do it was in the desert. There was no water there among other things. And then also, from a more theological perspective, when we read Leviticus 16 and we read about the need to provide atonement for the sanctuary, the priesthood, for the people, one of the things that happens is that there were two goats. One goat was for the Lord and the other goat was for Azazel. The goat for Azazel was sent into that wilderness area. Now there's a whole huge debate on who or what Azazel is that I won't get into at this point, but the goat was sent into the wilderness representing taking all those sins away to where they initially started, i.e. a bad place and a haunt for demons.

I mentioned a moment ago how important water is in this context and we need to keep that forefront in our minds. Water in the wilderness is a precious commodity. Getting a picture of this...Here's a quick map of the Middle East, or part of it anyway. If you look at this brown section right here, beige brown, that's the area that gets two to four inches of rain per year. And here we're going to talk somewhere between four to twelve right about there. So this is an area that is just bereft of water sufficient for survival.

I mentioned a moment ago that we have a number of wildernesses we want to talk about, so here are the ones we're going to run through. First of all, we're going to see two of our major patriarchs taking up residence in the edge of civilized territory. They're going to be in the wilderness area around Beersheba. We're also going to have Israel's experience as a nation taken out of slavery going to Mount Sinai. They have a series of wilderness experiences. Later on, David will be on the run from Saul and he will spend some time in the wilderness of Judah. In between the Old Testament and the New Testament period, we have a number of people who settle in the wilderness in a place called Qumran and areas around there. There are reasons why they do that, so I will mention them very briefly as

well. Then we have Jesus, son of David, having wilderness experiences in which he is going to very much embody some of the wilderness experiences of national Israel. And then finally, when we read some of the wonderful prophetic material we see the restoration of the wilderness as a beautiful look forward. This place that was desolate and barren and a haunt of demons, will be made right, completely made right. So that's the direction we're going to go.

Let's look at some maps first. When we think of wilderness, we're going to encompass this whole area of Sinai because that area does indeed get two to four inches of rain per year. It has widely, vastly ranging topographies. There are some springs roundabout here. Wherever you see the word "be'er," it is the Hebrew word for "well." So there are some sources of water, but this is a large set of multiple wildernesses.

First, the wilderness for Abraham and Isaac--the narratives that are unfolding in this area are going to be in Genesis 12-26. We learn that after Abraham comes to the land, he makes a quick sojourn down into Egypt because there's been famine in the area of Israel. He goes back up. First he goes to Bethel; they're semi-nomadic. But Abraham's going to settle in the area of the Negev where our oval is right here and he's going to be particularly in what we call the Western Negev Basin. The place names are going to be Gerar and Beersheba. What Abraham and Isaac after him will do is to move around the edges or the margins of the larger Canaanite city-states that have been there.

At the same time, especially after he settles in the area of the Western Negev, there are going to be conflicts with the Philistines. The Philistines are the people we talked about when we talked about the confrontations later on in Israel's history. They're mentioned in conjunction with the Abraham and patriarchal narratives. What that means in terms of when they arrive is another whole issue that we don't have time to get into at this point. But they are named as Philistines in the Genesis narrative. We see both Abraham and Isaac having altercations with them and we'll look at one of those passages in a moment.

Again, notice the names Gerar in the Western Negev area and Beersheba sort of in the center. The issue is always water. And we can understand why if we're talking about limited rainfall. Therefore, wells are going to be the places from which they get their water, and who has the wells and who controls the wells becomes a matter of contention.

Before we go there, however, just another note in terms of Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian handmaiden. As we read Genesis 16, Sarah is not able to have a child, so she gives Hagar to Abraham in order to have a child. Of course, there's all the tension that results in the two times that Hagar leaves. The first time she comes back (in chapter 16), the angel of the Lord tells her to come back, although she's on her way back to Egypt by way of Shur. She will eventually depart in Genesis 21. In that context we have a mention of the desert of Beersheba, or the wilderness of Beersheba, and then we also have Ishmael, her son, also living in the wilderness of Paran.

Well, let's back up a little bit. Now here is Gerar, in terms of how it looks. Water sources were wells; and the land produced this kind of vegetation. A wadi, by the way is a low, dry, (generally dry) riverbed, and when you do have rainfall the water flows in that wadi. Wells are generally dug in those valleys, or in those wadis, to access water.

Let's read a little bit about Genesis 26 and Isaac's experience. It says Isaac encamped in the valley, or the wadi, of Gerar, (actually not wadi in the biblical text, so let's say "valley"). He reopened the wells that had been dug by his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham died. Now, when you read the Abraham narratives, as I said, there had been contention between the Philistine servants of Abimelekh and Abraham over these wells. The reason, as a matter of fact, that Beersheba actually gets its name is because they form a treaty there; they take an oath, at the well. *Be'er* means "well" *Sheba* means "oath." *Sheba* can also mean "seven," so there's a little wordplay, but the name Beersheba is all wound up in this whole business of water rights. I thought we should get a

sense of the importance of water right away and these narratives have to do with its significance in the Negev area.

Just some characteristics of our Negev--this, by the way, is the Negev highlands; you can see some ridges and cliffs there. In this picture you can also see little bits of greenery, and the reason that's there is because people learn how to conserve the water that does come in the form of rainfall. The soil of the Negev is a light powdery, wind-blown soil, and when it rains normally, it runs right off (like putting water on talcum powder just runs). If they form dams and reservoirs, the water stops, and they can make it settle long enough that they can actually plant some things and grow them there. So that's what that green stuff is doing. It is not all that recently they learned how to do this. For centuries people have been aware of how to conserve water. On the chalky rocks surfaces, fine powdery soil gets wind-blown (we've mentioned that already). The maximum is 12 inches of rainfall for a year, and then the eastern borders receive much less than that. So, as we've mentioned, water sources are those wells that are dug in wadis, which is the background for our Isaac and Abraham stories.

A couple more stories to give us a feeling for what this wilderness will be like: here we are, in the area just south of Beersheba and a whirlwind is coming up, and this is the kind of thing that just blows all that powdery stuff that I've just been talking about. I had a former student who served in Iraq one tour and he said he knew what it was like to eat this whirlwind, because his lunch was this most of the time. So halfway (the picture) across we've got a whirlwind. Well the biblical text picks up on this; and Isaiah chapter 21 is talking about foreign invaders, like whirlwinds sweeping through the Negev. An invader from the desert comes, and then it moves on.

We're going to move away from the Negev and talk a little bit now about our national Israel experience, especially as that becomes a foundation for many of Jesus's own experiences in the wilderness. This happens to the people, or begins happening to the people, as they are en route to Sinai. Here they are, they've

crossed the Sea of Reeds (if we follow our little white arrows), coming out of Egypt and bondage. I know that there are at least eleven different suggestions for the location of Mount Sinai, and I'm not going to explore all of those. I tend to go still with the traditional Mount Sinai, which is right about where that arrow lands. It makes sense; God does not allow his people to go the way of the Philistines, because they're not ready to confront foreign peoples yet. He takes them into the most isolated area, into the southern third of the Sinai Peninsula that's rugged granite mountains, a place that's completely removed and isolated. God will spend a year with them there. Well, I should not say it that way; they will spend a year at Sinai, and God will be not only revealing his covenant to them, but also they will have the occasion to build their sanctuary, and to become molded into a people that are ready to be God's people. So for that reason I am going to suggest that it's down here, though I certainly wouldn't be militant about it. At any rate there's the wilderness of Sinai.

Then, as they move away from their years' experience at Mount Sinai, they're going to move up to the wilderness of Paran. They are going to go into the wilderness of Kadesh Barnea. Then they are going to visit and spend some time around the wilderness of Zin. It's from Kadesh Barnea, in Numbers chapters 13 and 14, that they send spies into the land, and that's all well and good. They come back saying what a wonderful land this is, milk and honey, lots of grapes, lots of produce. But unfortunately, it's a scary land, because the people have walled cities and they're big, so as you remember, Israel is then condemned to wander in the wilderness for another 38 years. A fair amount of this seems to be around this wilderness of Zin, since that name does show up repeatedly. So those are our wilderness contexts.

Let's talk a little bit about what happens in each of those. As I said earlier on, Israel is indeed delivered again, into the wilderness. God delivers them from bondage in Egypt, but they don't go right to the promise land; it's deliverance into

this land where they have nothing, but lack nothing, and they need to meet God there.

Through Moses, God commanded Pharaoh, multiple times, to let Israel go in order to worship in the wilderness (and there are biblical references here-- Exodus 3, 5, 7, and 8), where we are keenly aware of his presence. Why? Because it's quiet, because it's vast, because they have nothing. They need him, and they are away from all those distractions, all the things that would tend to draw them back to the culture of Egypt. They're away from those things. This is the wilderness.

Right when God confronts Moses first and tells him that he wants him to do this, he says the place where you are standing is holy ground. In other words, this is the place that God is going to call them back to, where they're going to meet with him. At this point in time, and actually a long time ago, tradition had it that the place where the Saint Catherine's Monastery was established does represent the area of Mount Sinai. So we have Saint Catherine's, or Santa Katarina, down at the foot hills, or the base, of Jebel Musa, the mountain of Moses. Lots of wonderful things I could say about Santa Katarina if I had time to do that. A Greek Orthodox monastery is there; it's been there since the sixth century. So there is a long standing tradition--texts there, icons there, wonderful stuff. We see just a wonderful picture of the Greek Orthodox monk, climbing to the top of Mt. Sinai.

After telling Moses that it was holy ground, he says, you shall worship God on this mountain. So here we are, and again I'm drawing on the fact that, or the suggestion that, this place was in the southern part of the Peninsula.

Let's see what it looks like to get there, with the idea of deliverance, but deliverance into a challenging context. This is what you see, shortly after you cross the Suez Canal. Here's the Gulf of Suez, a little portion of it here. While this is a small oasis, the rest of it looks pretty rough. Delivering into the wilderness... and as you turn to the interior to go into Mount Sinai again we have dry, barren, vast, endless, sort of frightening location, on the way to Sinai.

We're going to see a contrast here that we want to notice carefully in those chapters between Exodus 15, which is their song of deliverance of the sea, and their coming to Mount Sinai, Exodus 19. We have several incidents that show how God is testing his people, and we're going to see how God provided for them. We're going to look at each one of those just briefly, and I want you to hang on to them for what we look at in Numbers, with God's testing them and chastising them. So, keep that contrast that's coming, in mind. On the way he provides water, because after three days they don't have water, and God will indeed bring them to a place that had bitter waters, but Moses casts in a rod of tree and it turns sweet. He provides water again in Exodus 17, when Moses is commanded to strike the rock. So God will provide water in this area where water is not found generally speaking.

They're hungry. God will provide food. He also, in conjunction with bringing manna before them on a daily basis, begins to teach them the Sabbath, the fact that one day in the seven, they are going to have the gift of rest. Sometimes we look at Sabbath and think "Oh no, I have to quit working," but for the Israelites who had been working seven days a week as slaves in bondage, this has would have been the most tremendous gift that could have been given to them, that one day in the seven.

God will also bring victory from their enemies, the Amalekites, who come and besiege them in Deuteronomy 25:17. In Deuteronomy, when its talking about the Amalekite experience the Israelites have, it says that they actually were vicious enough that they attacked the people from behind, taking out the weak and the vulnerable. So vicious kinds of things, but God provided victory for them over the Amalekites. It's a testing time. It's a frightening time, but God gives them these victories.

In addition, He's their source of guidance. By day the Lord went ahead of them in the pillar of cloud to guide them, and, by the way, the cloud would also help them if it was hot. Because this wilderness, although it gets cold at night, gets

very hot during the day, this cloud would have been good in that sense as well. And by night the pillar of fire gave them light. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in the front of the people. So God provides and he directs them as they're moving.

They're to worship in the wilderness. "If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. God has brought them out, and now he's claiming them as his own, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. In order to do this properly, in order to be a kingdom of priests, they will have God's presence in their midst. That's what sanctuary is all about and it's in this Sinai context that God will indeed will establish the tabernacle as a sanctuary.

A sanctuary, is a place that is set apart. Bird sanctuaries are set apart. Likewise the sanctuary that God will have them establish is a place that's set apart and yet at the same time, it's his place for dwelling with them. So it's multifaceted. He's holy; he's set apart from them, but he's also condescended to dwell in their midst. He's present. He's imminent with his people. It's a tremendous gift, and the sanctuary is representing his presence with them.

Also, I've already mentioned the fact that it's set apart. What's marvelous about this is what we see in John chapter 1. When John is articulating what it means to have the "word" (who is with God and who was God), made flesh, in his prologue to his Gospel, what he says is that "the word became flesh." and tented among us." Therefore, in the minds of this audience they would know that here we've got Jesus doing exactly what God had done in establishing the tabernacle, choosing to take up residence with them. That's what the incarnation is doing. God is becoming present with them. So he is tenting among us and we behold his glory. What would you have happening in his tabernacle? Well it's the glory of God being manifested. So just a quick very painfully simplistic drawing here. Here are the curtains which set it apart, representing God's holiness. Here is the presence represented under the layers of the tabernacle tent itself, with God's presence manifested in the ark of the covenant.

I mentioned a moment ago that en route to Sinai, there was testing regarding provision. The Israelites should have had that in mind and been very aware that God indeed was faithfully providing for them in every way they could possibly imagine. Yet, as they leave Sinai, they are testing him, over and over again, and because they do, God will indeed bring chastisement. He tested and punished Israel's lack of faith and outright rebellion, manifested after his gracious gift of the covenant. In the wilderness we see more events that are indicative of Israel's lack of faithfulness. Their own testing in the wilderness results in fire and plague, Numbers chapter 11. Manna and quail will also show up in chapter 11. You will have the rebellion of Korah who was swallowed up by the earth, probably an earthquake of some kind.

In Numbers chapter 21, the people have been rebelling yet again, asking for more food and God sends serpents, fiery serpents. That context we'll look at in a moment a little bit more. God will command Moses to set up the serpent in the wilderness. They are also concerned about water, and we have the situation where Moses, kind of patterning after what he had done before and not following God's word carefully, again strikes the rock when God had said to speak to it. So everyone is going to suffer in that context and even Moses and Aaron will not be allowed to go into the promised land. What that means is that Moses, Aaron, and that whole generation of people met death in the wilderness. For the wilderness has a strong and powerful force to it. Death is in the wilderness and all the forces that are part of that.

At the same time, as I said, God was leading them, and as Moses writes Deuteronomy (written just before the people go into the land of Israel). God is going to remind them and Moses is going to refresh their memory on how God provided for them. "God led you through that vast and dreadful desert, with its venomous snakes and scorpions." It looks like a small snake, but it's one of the most lethal ones that exists in Sinai. It seems like every rock you turn over in some places, there is one kind of scorpion or another. "That thirsty and waterless land."

Here's what it looks like when it has drained a little bit and then gets barren and cracked. Notice something interesting however. Notice the resilience of life. We have little tiny things that can spring up and manage to live at least for a little while even after the surface has dried up.

Acacia trees are some of the most frequently seen trees in the whole wilderness Sinai area. Acacia trees are the same trees from which the tabernacle was built. Interesting, that that mention of that tree is very much true to the Sinai context. It suggests that maybe the directions for building the tabernacle were not given centuries later by somebody not living in the wilderness. It was for that context. The Acacia tree has roots that go down at least twice as far as the trees go up so they can access water.

Israel arrives at the wilderness of Zin and they stay at Kadesh or Kadash. This is the picture of the wilderness of Zin and again you get a real sense of the vastness of it. I will give you a little more of a sense of that. If you look very carefully, there is a figure of a person (happens to be me), standing right there. How tiny that is. How insignificant! Contrast this whole of the wilderness spread out before us. Here's Kadesh itself, Kadesh Barnea; there's an oasis there, but nevertheless, when you have as many people as the Israelites were, they certainly needed God's miraculous provision of water for them.

Let's look very briefly at this serpent situation because it's one that Jesus alludes to. In John chapter 3 (as a matter of fact two verses before a verse that we all know "for God so loved the world") here we have "just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness." Of course, John is recording Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus who has come to him at night and is probing to see what Jesus is all about. They have a conversation back and forth and Jesus seems to be prodding Nicodemus to understand further because Nicodemus doesn't seem to quite get it. So Jesus talks about the need to be born again or born from above and he talks about the importance of the Spirit. But then he says, "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of Man will be lifted up."

Let's look at the background for that in Numbers chapter 21. It's the Israelites complaining again. "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness, to die in the desert?" And so the Lord sends fiery venomous serpents. The people repent, Moses prays, and God says, "Make a bronze snake. Put it on a pole. Anyone who is bitten can look at it and live. " Now that's an unlikely thing. Because here they were commanded by the word of God to look at something that seemed, well, it had been the source of their death. Here it was on an elevated pole and they were to look at it and live in obedience, in believing obedience, to God's word. Isn't it interesting that a crucified Messiah was not what Nicodemus was looking for? It is not what the people were looking for when they were looking for the kingdom to come. Yet, that is what Jesus is saying. He is referring them back to that situation of belief in the OT context. The Israelites had to believe the word of God; likewise, those in Jesus' day needed to believe that a crucified Messiah would be their Source of eternal life, which is what Jesus goes on to promise in John 3:16.

Well, we've done the Patriarchs, Abraham and Isaac; we've talked about National Israel; now let's just briefly look at David in the wilderness. When we read 1 Samuel 23-26, David is on the run. Saul is out to kill him. Saul knows that David is going to take over for him. Saul is angry at his son Jonathan because he is David's friend, and so David has fled. First he fled out to the Philistines, interestingly enough. But he doesn't stay there, and heads to this area of Judean wilderness (here). That is where he is going to spend a fair amount of time with lots of interesting incidents that take place. We also have this as a backdrop probably for a number of David's Psalms. I would suggest that David knew this area well already because he had been serving as a shepherd. Bethlehem (which is right here), is, as we saw earlier, kind of overlooking to the west, but it's also overlooking to the east. It is right on the edge of the wilderness. And so, in the winter season and spring season, David could have taken his flocks out to the wilderness. He would know this area very well. And it becomes a place of refuge,

probably even prior to his fleeing from Saul, and perhaps even after that time. Psalm 63: “Oh God, you are my God. Early will I seek you. My soul thirsts for you. My body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.” And David sensed that lesson of barrenness and dryness he could apply to himself as well, in those spiritually barren and dry times. “My soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you.”

Here is the area that if we went farther to the west, we would end up in the area of Bethlehem. Here is our steep cliff that is going to go down to the Dead Sea, and it is that area where we see En Gedi. God does provide water in the wilderness, not only for David but for others who are there. There are some springs along the slope of that cliff, and again, we see a Psalm that alludes to this, “The Lord is my Shepard I shall not want, he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside...”, and this is probably a better way to understand it; rather than “still waters,” it’s “waters that provide rest,” waters that provide refreshment. That is exactly what waters do in that wilderness area. They provide refreshment for someone coming after hours and hours and hours out in hot, dry territory. As David was fleeing from Saul, we find him eventually coming to stay in the strongholds of En Gedi. And so En Gedi is a place where one of these springs is. The name for Spring is *En* so the spring Gedi, “the Spring of the Goats.”

Now just one look at one incident that might be elucidated a bit by some of the topography in the wilderness. As you look at this particular picture, you see a deep, deep, deep canyon cut through these layers of limestone. There are little paths along the side, a little path over here as well. Some people suggest that when David, in one of the incidents where he is confronting Saul and Abner and so forth, and his men are on one side, that might be what we’ve got. David crossed over to the “other side.” There was a wide space between them, in other words, between Saul and Abner, and David and his men. They can carry on a conversation but Abner and Saul, who are intent on getting to David, can’t do

anything about it, because there is a lot of territory they would have to traverse to get a hold of them. Then finally, well not finally, but finally for us, in Psalm 61, the Psalmist, David, says, “Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.” In other words, in all these turmoils, all the tensions, all the fright, all the frustrations, David goes to the strong holds, and in that stronghold, he is able to look up at these cliffs of rock and he is able to say “Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.” The one of security, the one of provision, the one of protection.

Well, we’ve talked about the Patriarchs and Israel, a brief look at David and now just a quick interlude before we look at Jesus, the son of David. During the Inter-testamental period, lots of things are happening. We suggested that in conjunction with the Galilean material. In the 2nd century B.C., one of the issues that was particularly troubling was that the Jerusalem temple and the Jerusalem priesthood personnel, were being, well, polluted. Let’s put it that way. We’ll talk about that more in a moment. This is kind of our, post card picture of Qumran; this is cave four. There are eleven caves. Wonderful manuscripts were found and we’ll say more about those in a moment, but when we think of Qumran, this is usually the picture we think of.

Now, back to my narrative. Who are these people? Well, as we read through those texts that were found in those 11 caves, and especially cave 4, and as we look at the archeological finds these people, whoever they were, had a profound focus on covenant--on new covenant and on returning to the covenant. They also had an incredible emphasis on the priesthood, but a proper priesthood. They called themselves, the sons of Zadok, and Zadok, as we know, is one of the names in the Priestly line. Then of course also, they were very much involved in ritual purification, doing a lot of discussion of purity rites and immersing themselves in order to be pure.

So, how does this all work with what I just said a moment ago? The suggestion is that a terrible situation is taking place in Jerusalem, because we are talking about Hellenism, and Hellenization. We’re talking about the adoption of

Greek and Roman ideas, Greek and Roman philosophy, Greek and Roman wealth and cosmopolitan ways of living, and embedding that into the very fabric of Judaism. That affected the temple and the priesthood. When we get to the 2nd century BC, we've got the priesthood itself being bought and sold to the highest bidder. Things are ugly. There's lots more we could say about that.

Therefore the people who founded this community seemed to have done it because they wanted to indeed retreat to a place where they could renew the covenant where it properly should be, where they could meet with God, where they could be a purified priesthood because things were so terrible at that point in time. Now, there is lots more to say about Qumran. I could give you a whole lecture on Qumran itself, so I'm not going to do more with that, other than to say that we are interested in Qumran for a couple of reasons. One is, that the texts that were found there have been a goldmine, in lots of ways. Biblical texts, portions of them, and whole manuscripts of some things like, Isaiah. We are also interested in it because it gives us another window into the Judaisms that were evident in the first centuries when Jesus came along, because, as I note for you, these places were flourishing, significantly flourishing in Jesus' day. Qumran was destroyed by the Romans in AD 68. So We know that a couple generations before that, one generation before that, this was a vibrant community. It is on the fringes in the terms of Jerusalem, but it is a vibrant community.

Also, I would suggest, although it may not be Qumran proper, that, when we read at the end of Luke chapter one, that John the Baptist's parents (who were elderly when he was born, we know that; that's the whole point of the narrative) probably, being close to the end of their lives, recognized that this Qumran community was a safe place. The community is out in the wilderness, let's put it that way. Remember that both of them were from the priestly line themselves. Perhaps they were somewhat disaffected by what was going on in the priestly Jerusalem context. We do know, as we read Luke, that John the Baptist was reared in the Wilderness, so he would know this whole scene of withdrawing from the

messes and the messiness in the life of Jerusalem and growing up in that wilderness area. We'll say more about that momentarily.

This is another picture of the wilderness area. And again, I just want you to see how vast this is. It's this kind of territory into which the Holy Spirit compelled Jesus to go after his baptism. Let's look at that a little more closely.

Jesus is baptized in the Jordan River by John. "The word of God came to John in the wilderness, he went into all the country around the Jordan" This is now going to be our wilderness of Judah—"preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As Isaiah said 'a voice of one calling' (or 'a voice of one calling in the wilderness' depends on how you punctuate that). 'A voice of one calling in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be exalted, every mountain and hill made low.'" Think of that picture you just saw; it's rugged, it's up and down. If you start going down the wrong way, you're going get lost because you're going to go in the wrong valley or up on one of those ridges and it's the wrong ridge. For us that's beautiful but people traveling across it would love the news that every valley is going to be exalted and every hill made low. It would be easy for the Lord to come. "Prepare the way of the Lord make straight paths for him, every valley exalted, every hill made low, crooked roads will become straight and rough places plain and all flesh shall see the salvation of the Lord." This was a promise that was made in terms of the preparation coming, and the wilderness was a perfect picture to kind of show that there was some preparation that needed to be done.

Well, Matthew 3 picks it up, "John baptizes Jesus to fulfill all righteousness." And this has specifically to do, I would suggest, with the continuing focus of Matthew on the fact that Jesus is living out some of the experiences of national Israel. We see it when Matthew talks about "out of Egypt have I called my son" but now we're going to see it as Jesus going through the baptism, just as Israel came through the sea. Jesus going is into the wilderness, just as Israel went into the wilderness. Then Mark will talk particularly about the

spirit, driving Jesus into the wilderness, tempting Jesus for forty days, echoing Israel's forty years in the wilderness. Satan challenges the word of God and God's intentions. "If you're the Son of God," which is very much like what Satan did to Adam. Jesus is our second Adam, the first Adam went through the same thing. Genesis 3, "God really didn't say this. God really didn't say that you couldn't eat from any tree in the garden." Satan challenges in exactly the same way.

Of course, as we look at those temptations, each one of them is the kind of thing that we are tempted with, too, because it's pressuring Jesus to take the popular way to the kingdom, to do the thing that looks good, to do the thing that looks prideful and self-fulfilling and all those sorts of things. He's tempted first to make bread out of all that stone and rock that you saw there. Moses made bread; that would be a reliving of the Moses experience. Moses provides bread for all people in the wilderness. Jesus, you make bread out of these stones. Satan takes him to the pinnacle of the temple (in some way; I don't know how this happens), in Jerusalem. It would be the area that was highly visible and he would certainly have an audience if he cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. It would be a flashy display of power, and then, of course, the greatest of the temptations: you can have all of these kingdoms if you'll bow down and worship me. Jesus, of course, responds to this tempter in ways that we could certainly echo and mirror. Jesus, as I note for you, indicates that the Word of God is entirely sufficient and he goes repeatedly to Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy, the iteration or the reiteration of the Torah through Moses, right before the Israelites go into the land.

The utter sufficiency of the word of God--I have suggested some of this already but let's push this a little bit further. Adam endures temptation along with Eve, and Christ endures severe temptation in this wilderness context. Those are the same but notice the contrast in terms of place. Adam and Eve, were in the Garden of Eden; they have everything that's perfect, that's beautiful, that's lush--satisfaction of their physical need. There was plenty of water; we learn about the waters that are there. There is plenty of food in the trees, all the trees with the

exception of one. The presence of God is there with them, walking with them. They're not alone; they have each other. Jesus, by way of contrast, is in a barren wilderness; he's been fasting for forty days and forty nights. He's by himself; he's God, but he is by himself. Of course, he has come into a world which is already totally degraded by sin. Such incredible contrast and yet here is Jesus who tells Satan in essence to take it and go away. Hebrews four is just a good lesson. "He was tempted in every way such as we are, but without sin." Therefore he does become our great high priest.

Well, that's our patriarchs, Israel, David, community in the wilderness, Jesus as the son of David in the wilderness and then we can see something wonderful in the end. The prophetic promises are something that gives us a great deal of hope. We'll go through these fairly quickly; they are lovely and are going to point us towards the end when indeed all will be set right. In Isaiah 32, the Spirit is poured out upon us from on high and the wilderness becomes a fertile field and the fertile field is considered a forest. Notice the stages here--the forest, lots of trees, lots of water. "Then justice,"--so it's not just physical flourishing. "Then justice will dwell in the wilderness and righteousness will abide in the fertile field and the work of righteousness will be peace. Then my people will live in a peaceful habitation." Chapter 35--"the wilderness in the desert will be glad; the Arabah (a barren area) will rejoice and blossom." "The lame will leap like a deer, the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. Waters will break forth in the wilderness, streams in the Arabah." Instead of whirlwinds in the Negev, now we have streams in the Arabah. "The redeemed of the Lord shall return and come with singing to Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads."

A couple of things we can draw from this. Notice how the prophetic message weaves together issues that have everything to do with our spiritual wellbeing as well as our physical wellbeing. It's a perfect fabric of righteousness, healing, agricultural fertility, social harmony. Then finally, a look ahead as the book of Revelation does to the restoration of the Garden of Eden context. "The

desolate land shall be tilled, whereas it lay desolate in the sight of all who pass by. And they shall say, 'this land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden,' and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited." In other words, they are secure. "Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I, the Lord, build the ruined places, and I plant that, that was desolate. I the Lord have spoken it and I will do it" (Ezek. 36:34-36). Three prophetic messages pointing us forward to a time when God will indeed restore the perfect fabric of righteousness and peace.

Here are some personal applications: Israel's wilderness is often bitterness, lack of faith, and rebellion. Ours is too if we are not careful--those kinds of demons that we wrestle with. As we think of wilderness, we don't want to just think of geographical, topographical things; we want to think of the spiritual wilderness that we need to work on to overcome. Will they be God's means to bring greater intimacy with him? As the Israelites find a sanctuary in the wilderness, we have a sanctuary in our hearts, to refine, to purify our spirits, to teach us to be obedient so that indeed we will keep the covenant that God has made with us. Then he will bless us in the ways that are articulated especially in that last passage in Ezekiel. Finally, it's not just me and you and me and God (that's very bad grammar), but it's we who articulate our faith in a wider world, leave our personal wilderness, work diligently for the full restoration of justice and shalom, because there are lots and lots and lots of desolate places in this world.

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