

Dr. Elaine Phillips, Historical Geography Intro.: Session 6, Wilderness

This is Dr. Elaine Phillips in her final lecture, lecture number six, Historical Geography, an Introduction. Lecture number six will focus on the various wildernesses of Israel. Okay, at this point, we're going to address a whole different type of area that we haven't seen yet, and that is the wilderness.

Walter Brueggemann, in some context that I can't remember, has 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 at a number of different levels. So, some background information.

First of all, here's what wilderness looks like, and I'm showing this particularly because oftentimes those of us who come from North America, and particularly 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 of 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 of wilderness. Let's run through them.

When Israel is 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 often use it as a metaphor for testing. So, keep that in mind.

I've already mentioned that wilderness there means desert, and therefore those tests are often spiritually dry and barren times. It's a metaphor that works in that way as well. As you looked at that photograph a little bit earlier, one of the things that you saw was all kinds of undulating cliffs and so forth and so on.

One can exceedingly easily get lost in this area. If you just head up one of the wrong directions, the wrong little 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 us and the context in which we usually live are gone, and therefore it has that aspect of it.

And that means that in many ways, all these things together, but also the quietness, mean 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. Just a little bit of background.

There isn't just one wilderness that the Israelites encounter. We'll look at a map and look at at least five different wildernesses. And picking up on what I just said a moment ago, this is an ambiguous place.

And let me just walk through what I mean here. First of all, it 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, in the wilderness of Paran, in all those wildernesses. They even spend time in the wilderness before they get to Mount Sinai and have 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, the wilderness does become a place of purification. It's thought of as a place of worship.

In fact, when Moses, speaking for God, first goes to Pharaoh, he says, "We want to go for three days into the wilderness to 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 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 in the mythology with demons, and therefore it becomes a symbol.

The wilderness becomes a symbol of desolation. That finds its way working out in terms of the desert representing everything that's hostile. If you wanted to die, the place to do it was in the desert.

There wasn't 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 atonements for the sanctuary, for the priesthood, for the people, one of the

things that happens is that there are two goats. And one goat is for the Lord, and the other goat is for Azazel.

And Azazel is the goat for Azazel, is 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 that goat is sent into the wilderness, representing taking all those sins away to where they initiated, where they started, i.e., a bad place and a haunt for demons. 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 the heart of it anyway, and if you look at this brown section right here, beige brown, and this one here, that's the area that gets two to four inches of rain per year, per year. And so, here we're going to talk somewhere between four and twelve, right about there.

So this is an area that is just bereft of sufficient water 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 on 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. The son of David, oh sorry, I've skipped one, sorry. In between the Old Testament and the New Testament period, we have a number of people who settled in the wilderness, a place called Qumran, and areas around there.

And there are reasons why they do that, so I'll mention them very briefly as well. Then we have Jesus as son of David having wilderness experiences, in which way, in cases, he's going to very much embody some of the wilderness experiences of national Israel. We'll see that unfold.

And then finally, when we read some of the wonderful prophetic material, we see the restoration of the wilderness as a beautiful look forward to when this time that is desolate, this place that is 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.

Whoops, I'm going to back up on that one. 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 around here. Wherever you see the word bir, it means it's an Arabic word for well, bir. So there are some sources of water, but this is a large set of multiple wildernesses.

And then we'll also look up in this section right along in here too, as we make our way through. Well, the wilderness for Abraham and Isaac, the narratives that are unfolding in this area are going to be in Genesis 12 through 26. And let's see if we can pick up pretty much where this is.

We learn that after Abraham comes to the land, makes a quick sojourn down in Egypt, because there's been famine in the area of Israel, he goes back up. And first, he goes to Bethel. So we see him wandering around.

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.

Probably can't see that, but that's what that text says right there. Key names are going to be Gerar and Beersheba. What Abraham and Isaac after him are going to do are going to be kind of to move around the edges or the margins of our larger Canaanite city-states that have been there.

At the same time, especially after he settles in this 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 arrived 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. And 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 out in our Western Negev area, and then Beersheba, sort of in the center. The issue is always water.

It's always water. And we can understand why. If we're talking about limited rainfall, then wells are going to be the places from which they get their water.

Who has the wells, who controls the wells, becomes a matter of contention. Before we go there, however, just another note in terms of Hagar, because this is Sarah's Egyptian handmaiden. And as we read Genesis 16, when Sarah is not able to have a child, she gives Hagar to Abraham in order to have a child.

And of course, there's all the tension that results. And two times, Hagar leaves. The first time she comes back, Chapter 16, the angel of the Lord tells her to come back, although she's on her way back to Egypt, the way of the sea.

But she will eventually depart in Genesis 21. And 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, living in the wilderness of Paran.

Well, let's back up a little bit, excuse me, and look at what Gerar is in terms of how it looks. Water sources in wells will produce 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. So 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. It's actually not wadi in the wadi. He reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of 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 Amalek and Abraham over these wells. And 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. Sheva can mean oath, and it 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. So we get a sense of the importance of water right away in these narratives that have to do with this wilderness 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 comes in the form of rainfall. Normally, the soil of the Negev is a light, powdery, wind-blown soil. And when it rains, it runs right off.

It's like putting water on talcum powder, just runs. But if they form little 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's not only recently that they've learned how to do this. For centuries, people have been aware of how to conserve water. At any rate, chalky rock surfaces, fine powdery soil that's wind-blown.

I've mentioned that already. At the maximum 12 inches of rainfall per year, and on the eastern borders are sections with much less than that. And 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 pictures to give us a feeling for what this wilderness would be like, living in it. 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 dust that I've just been talking about into whole columns.

I had a former student who served in Iraq one time, and he said he knew what it was like to eat this whirlwind, because his lunch was this, usually, most of the time. So halfway across, we've got a whirlwind. Well, the biblical text picks up on this.

In Isaiah chapter 21, talking about foreign invaders, it says, like whirlwinds sweeping through the Negev, an invader from the desert comes, and then it moves on to talk about that. Well, we're going to move away from the Negev and talk a little bit now about our national Israel experience, especially since that becomes a foundation for many of Jesus' own experiences in the wilderness. This happens to the people, or it begins happening to the people, as they are en route to Sinai.

So 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 11 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 up there. It makes sense that, as God does not allow his people to go the way of the Philistines, because they're not ready to confront foreign peoples yet, he would take them into the most isolated area, and it's the southern third of the Sinai Peninsula that's rugged, rugged granite mountains, a place that's completely removed, 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 not only reveal his covenant to them, but also they will have the occasion to build their sanctuary and to become molded into a people that's ready to be God's people. So for that reason, I'm going to suggest it's down here, although 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 of experience at Mount Sinai, they're going to move up to the wilderness of Paran.

They are going to go into Kadesh Barnea, and then they are going to visit and spend some time around the wilderness of Zin.

It's from Kadesh Barnea that, in Numbers chapters 13 and 14, they send spies into the land, and that's all well and good. They come back saying, "What a wonderful land this is, flowing with 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 consigned to wander in the wilderness for another 38 years.

A fair amount of that seems to be in this area around the wilderness of Zin, since that name does show up. So those are our wilderness contexts. Let's talk a little bit about what happens in each of those.

As I said earlier, Israel is indeed delivered into the wilderness. God delivers them from bondage in Egypt, but they don't go right to the promised land. It's a deliverance into this place where they have nothing, but they lack nothing, and they need to meet God there.

So, a couple of things to read. Through Moses, God commanded Pharaoh multiple times to let Israel go in order to worship in the wilderness, and I give the references here, Exodus 3, 5, 7, and 8, where they would be keenly aware of his presence. Why? Because it's quiet, because it's vast, because they have nothing.

They need him, and they're 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 will be the place that God's 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 St. Catherine's Monastery is established does represent the area of Mount Sinai.

So we have St. Catherine's or Santa Catarina down at the foothills or at the base of Jebel Musa, the mountain of Moses. Lots of wonderful things I could say about Santa Catarina. Don't have time to do that.

Greek Orthodox monastery that's there, it's been there since the 6th century, so a long, long-standing tradition. Texts there, icons there, wonderful stuff. Here we see just an interesting picture of one of the Greek Orthodox monks climbing up to the top of Mount Sinai.

And again, after telling Moses that that's holy ground, then 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 indeed the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula in our rugged granite mountains. 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 Gulf of Suez, sorry, the Suez Canal. Here's the Gulf of Suez, a little portion of it here. And although this is a small oasis, the rest of this looks pretty, well, it looks pretty rough.

Delivering into the wilderness. And as you turn into the interior to go into Mount Sinai, again, we have dry, barren, endless, vast, sort of frightening locations. On the way to Sinai, we're going to see a contrast here that we want to note fairly carefully.

In those chapters between Exodus 15, which is their song of deliverance at the sea, and their coming to Mount Sinai in Exodus 19, we have several incidents that show how God is testing these people. And we're going to show how God provided for them. We're going to look through each one of these just briefly, and then 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, well, he provides water, because after three days, they don't have water. And God will indeed bring them to a place that has bitter waters, but Moses casts in a rod of a tree, and it turns sweet.

We provide 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, generally speaking. They're hungry.

God will provide food. And he also, in conjunction with bringing manna for them on a daily basis, begins to teach them the Sabbath, the fact that one day in seven they are going to have the gift of rest. Sometimes we look at Sabbath and think, oh no, I got to quit working.

But for the Israelites who had been working seven days a week as slaves in bondage, this would have been the most tremendous gift that could have been given to them, that one day in seven. God will also provide victory over their enemies, the Amalekites, who come and besiege them. In Deuteronomy 23, it's the 23, 25, 23, it says 25, 25.

I'll check. At any rate, in Deuteronomy, when it talks about the Amalekite experience that 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 Amalekite enemies.

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 on a pillar of cloud to guide them.

And by the way, the cloud would also help them if it were hot, because this wilderness, although it gets cold at night, gets very hot during the day. And so this cloud would have been a good one, in that sense, perhaps as well. And by night, in a pillar of fire to give 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, keep my covenant, then 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. And 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 establish for them a temple, sorry, tabernacle, and later establish a tabernacle as a sanctuary. And there are some important aspects about this as well. A sanctuary, as we think of the word, is a place that is set apart.

You have bird sanctuaries. They're set apart from what's round about. Likewise, this 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 got that multifaceted thing. 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 mentioned the fact, already mentioned the fact that it's set apart.

What's marvelous about this is what we see in John chapter 1. Because when John is articulating what this means to have the word, who was with God and who was God, made flesh in his prologue to his gospel, what he says is the word became flesh, and the Greek is tented among us. Tented among us. And therefore, in the minds of his

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. It's God becoming present with them.

So he tented among us. And then beholding his glory. What do you have happening in the tabernacle? Well, it's the glory of God being manifested.

So just a quick, very painfully simplistic drawing here. Here's the curtains which set it apart. Set it apart and represent the holiness.

But here is the presence represented under the layers of the tabernacle tent itself, with God's presence manifested in the Ark of the Covenant. Well, I mentioned a moment ago that en route to Sinai, there was testing and provision. The Israelites should have had that in mind and been very aware that God was indeed faithfully providing for them in every way they could possibly imagine.

And yet, as they leave Sinai, they are testing him over and over again. And because they do, God will indeed bring chastisement. Tested and punished Israel's lack of faith and outright rebellion manifested after his gracious gift of the covenant.

So in the wilderness, we see more events that are indicative of Israel's lack of faithfulness. Their own testing in the wilderness. Fire and plague in Numbers chapter 11.

Manna and quail will also show up in chapter 11. You have the rebellion of Korah being swallowed up by the earth, probably an earthquake of some kind in Numbers chapter 21. The people have been rebelling yet again and asking for more food.

And God sends serpents, fiery serpents. And in that context, we'll look at it for a moment, a little bit more. God will command Moses to set up a serpent in the wilderness.

But 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 speak to it. So everybody is going to suffer in this context.

And even Moses and Aaron are not going to 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. So the wilderness has a strong and powerful force to it in terms of the connotations.

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, Deuteronomy being written just before the people go into the land of Israel, God's 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. This, by the way, looks like a small snake, but it's one of the most lethal ones that exists in Sinai. Scorpion here, 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 after it has rained 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 off. Acacia trees, I should say, acacia trees are some of the most frequently seen trees in the whole wilderness Sinai area. And acacia trees are the trees from which the tabernacle was built.

Interesting that the mention of that tree is very much in 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.

But the acacia tree has roots that go down at least twice as far as the tree goes up. They can access water. Israel arrives at the wilderness of Zin, and they stay at Kadesh.

This is a picture of the wilderness of Zin. And again, you get a real sense of the vastness of it. And I will give you a little more of a sense of that.

If you look very carefully, there is a figure of a person, who happens to be me, standing right there. And how tiny that is, how insignificant in contrast to this whole wilderness spread out before us. Here's Kadesh itself, Kadesh Barnea; there's an oasis there.

Nevertheless, when you have as many people as the Israelites did, 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 three, 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. And of course, John is recording Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, who has come to him at night

and is kind of probing to see what Jesus is all about. And they had a conversation back and forth.

And Jesus seems to be prodding Nicodemus to understand further because Nicodemus doesn't seem to quite get it. And 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.

Well, let's look at the background for that. An artistic representation. And the background, Numbers chapter 21, is, well, 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 was 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. And 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's not what the people were looking for when they were looking for the kingdom to come.

And yet that's what Jesus is saying. He's referring them back to that situation of belief in the Old Testament 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 the national Israel. Now, let's just briefly look at David in the wilderness.

When we read 1 Samuel 23 through 26, David's on the run. Saul's out to kill him. Saul knows that David is going to take over for him.

Saul's angry at his son Jonathan because he's David's friend. And so David has fled. He first fled out to the Philistines, interestingly enough, but he doesn't stay there, and he heads to this area of Judean wilderness right around here.

And that's where he's going to spend a fair amount of time. Lots of interesting incidents 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's right on the edge of the wilderness.

And so in the winter season and the spring season, David could have taken his flocks out into 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's no water.

And David sensed a lesson in that barrenness and that dryness that he could apply to himself as well in those spiritually barren and dry times. My soul thirsts for you. My body longs for you.

Up on top of this is the area that if we went farther to the right or to the west, we would end up in the area of Bethlehem. Here's our steep cliff that is going to go down to the Dead Sea. And it's in 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 that slope of that cliff. And again, we see a psalm that alludes to this, one that's very familiar to us, one we love.

The Lord's my shepherd, 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 make me still, waters that provide refreshment. And that's exactly what waters do in that wilderness area. They provided 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. Ein is the name for spring, so it's the spring of Gedi, spring of the goats.

Now, just one look at one incident that might be elucidated a little 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. And so they go up very sharply, like so.

Little paths along the sides, perhaps, and 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 David 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, and they could carry on a conversation. But Abner and Saul, who are intent on getting David, can't do anything about it because there's a lot of territory they'd have to traverse to actually get a hold on them. And then finally, well not finally, but finally for us, in Psalm 61, where 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 frustration, David goes to the strongholds.

Now that stronghold, he's able to look up at these cliffs of rock, and he's 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, we've talked about Israel. Brief look at David, and then just a quick interlude before we move to Jesus as the son of David.

During the intertestamental period, lots and lots of things were happening. We suggested that in conjunction with the Galilee material. But in the second century, one of the issues that was particularly troubling was that the Jerusalem temple and the Jerusalem temple priesthood personnel were being, well, polluted.

Let's put it that way. And I'll talk about more of that in a moment. Let me just take an interlude here and mention that this is sort of our poster, postcard picture of Qumran.

This is Cave 4; there were 11 caves, and wonderful manuscripts were found there. I'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, lots we could say about that, and as we look at the archaeological finds, one of the things we find is that these people, whoever they were, had a profound focus on covenant, on new covenant, 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, was one of the names in the priestly line. And then, of course, they were also very much involved in ritual purification, doing lots and lots 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 the terrible situation that was taking place in Jerusalem was because we're 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 into the very fabric of Judaism, and that affected the temple and the priesthood. When we get to the second century B.C., we've got the priesthood itself being bought and sold to the highest bidder.

Things are ugly, and there's lots more we could say about that. Therefore, the people who founded this community seem to have done it because they wanted to indeed retreat to a place where they could renew the covenant as 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's lots more to say about Qumran.

I'll give you a whole lecture on Qumran itself, so I'm not going to do any more with that other than to say we're interested in Qumran for a couple of reasons. One is that the texts that were found there have been a gold mine in lots and lots of ways. Biblical texts, portions of them, and whole manuscripts of some things, like Isaiah.

We're also interested in it because it gives us another window into one of the Judaisms that was evident in the first century when Jesus came along, because as I note for you, these wilderness communities were flourishing, significantly flourishing in Jesus' day. Qumran itself was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 68, so we know that a couple of generations before that, one generation before that, this is a vibrant community. It's on the fringes in terms of Jerusalem, but it's a vibrant community.

I would also suggest, although it may not be Qumran proper, that when we read at the end of Luke chapter 1 that John the Baptist's parents, who were elderly when he was born, we know that, that's the point of the whole narrative, they probably, being close to the end of their lives, recognized that this Qumran community was a safe place, or the communities 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 with what was going on in the priestly Jerusalem context, and so 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 of 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 bit 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, so get our ideas, 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 for 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.

I said if you start going on the wrong way, you're going to get lost because you're going to go into one of those valleys that's the wrong valley, or up one of those ridges that's the wrong ridge. For us, that's beautiful, but for people traveling across it, they would love the news that every valley is going to be exalted and every hill made low. It'll be easy for the Lord to come, prepare the way of the Lord, and make straight paths for him.

Every valley exalted, every hill made low, crooked roads will become straight, rough places plain, and all flesh shall see the salvation of the Lord. This was a promise that was made to think 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 a 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 into the wilderness, just as Israel went into the wilderness. And then Mark will talk particularly about the spirit driving Jesus into the wilderness.

Tempted for 40 days, echoing Israel's 40 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.

And 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 pressing Jesus to take a 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 stony stuff that you saw out there. Moses made bread.

That would be a reliving of the Moses experience. Moses provides bread for all the people in the wilderness. Jesus, you make bread out of these stones.

Satan takes him to the pinnacle of the temple in some way. Don't know how this happens. Temple in Jerusalem.

It would have been the area that was highly exalted, and he would certainly have an audience if he could cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. Flashy display of power. And then, of course, the greatest of the temptations, you can have all these kingdoms if you'll bow down and worship me.

Jesus, of course, responds to his tempter in ways that we could certainly echo and mirror, because Jesus will, as I note for you, indicate that the word of God is entirely sufficient, and he goes repeatedly to Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is 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 suggested some of this already, but let's push this just a little bit further because, indeed, Adam endures temptation along with Eve, and Christ endures severe temptation in this wilderness context. Those are the same, but notice the contrasts in terms of place. Adam and Eve are in the Garden of Edom.

They have everything that's perfect, that's beautiful, that's lush. Satisfaction of their physical needs. There's plenty of water.

We learn about the waters that are there. There's 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 40 days and 40 nights. He's by himself. He's God, but he's by himself.

And, of course, he has come into a world that is already totally degraded by sin in its entire fabric. So, incredible contrast, and yet here is Jesus who tells Satan, in essence, to take it and go away. Hebrews 4 is just a good lesson here.

Tempted in every way, as we are, but without sin. And, therefore, he does become our great high priest. Well, that's our patriarchs, Israel, David, the community in the wilderness, and Jesus as the son of David in the wilderness.

And then we can see something wonderful at the end. The prophetic promises with regard to the wilderness are something that gives us a great deal of hope. And we'll just go through these fairly quickly.

They're lovely. They're something that are going to point us towards the end when, indeed, all will be set right. Isaiah 32, when 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 there are 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 and the desert will be glad. The Aravah, 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 Aravah.

All right? So, instead of whirlwinds in the Negev, now we have streams in the Aravah. 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 well-being, as well as our physical well-being. Perfect fabric, righteousness, healing, agricultural fertility, and social harmony. And then, finally, a look ahead, as the book of Revelation does, to a restoration of a Garden of Eden context.

The desolate land shall be tilled, whereas it lay desolate in the sight of all that passed by. And they shall say, this land that was desolate is become like the Garden of Eden. And the waste and the desolate and the ruined cities have become fenced and are inhabited.

In other words, they're secure. Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I, the Lord, build the ruined places, and I plant that which was desolate. I, the Lord, have spoken it, and I will do it.

Three prophetic messages pointing us forward to a time when God will indeed restore the perfect fabric of righteousness and peace. You can probably leave them off, but anyway, personal applications here. Israel's wilderness is often a result of bitterness and lack of faith, rebellion.

Ours do too if we're not careful, those kinds of demons that we wrestle with. And so, as we think of wilderness, we don't want to just think of geographical, topographical things. We want to think of the spiritual wildernesses that we need to work to overcome, to find the waters that are there.

Will they be God's means to bring greater intimacy with him? As the Israelites, a sanctuary in the wilderness, 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, and he will bless us in ways that are articulated in that last passage in Ezekiel. And then finally, it's not just me and you and me and God. That's very bad grammar, but it's we who are to 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 of desolate places in this world. Now, that's the end.