

Life in the Wilderness

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Date: 26 October 2025

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[0 : 00] Okay, page 63 is about that far through. No, sorry, 73.

! So, Exodus chapter 16, starting from the beginning of the chapter.! The 16th, which is between Elan and Sinai, on the 15th day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. In the desert, the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, if only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt, there we sat throwing pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted.

But you have brought us out into this desert to starve the entire assembly to death. Then the Lord said to Moses, I will rain down bread from heaven for you.

The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions.

[1 : 20] On the sixth day, they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days. So, Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, In the evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt.

And in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we that you should grumble against us? Moses also said, you will know it was the Lord when he gives you meat to eat in the evening, and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him.

Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord. Then Moses told Aaron, say to the entire Israelite community, Come before the Lord, for he has heard your grumbling.

While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked towards the desert, and there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud. The Lord said to Moses, I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites.

Tell them, at twilight you will eat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God. That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp.

[2 : 51] When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, What is it? But they did not know what it was.

Moses said to them, It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat. Many thanks, Judith. I'm Alistair.

Very nice to meet you if we haven't met before. Before we come to look at God's word together, let's pray. Our Father in heaven, you're the God who reigns on the earth, and the waters do not return empty, Lord.

And in the same way, Lord, you send your word to us, and we know that your word never returns empty, but accomplishes every purpose for which you sent it.

So, Lord, please help us now to hear what you have to say, to be transformed knowing that your word will work in power. And help me as I speak to do so in your strength.

[4 : 05] In Jesus' name. Amen. We're looking at today about walking in the wilderness. Here's me in a desert somewhere, walking.

Now, imagine you're in this kind of desert, somewhere you've never been before, and you're trying to get home. What kind of things will you need to get you home?

Go on, Philip. Compass. Yeah, yeah, that's right. Yeah, you might need a compass to show you the way. Okay, a compass, yeah. What other things might you need? Water.

Water, yeah. It's very dry out there, and you need water. Okay, so we've got compass, we've got water. Any other things? Any other thoughts? Food, yeah.

Bread. Bread. Anything else? Maybe. What's that? Blanket. Yeah, you probably do. I haven't got a blanket, but you're probably right, yeah.

[5 : 17] You've got a compass, but how are you going to know which way you need to go? A map. Okay. Okay, so I've got a map here. Great. So, these things are all good, but you're not going to get home unless you follow the map, right?

Unless you know where you're going to get food on the way, right? Today, we're going to think a bit about that. Now, it might seem a bit strange to be talking about being in the wilderness, but actually, sometimes in life, it can feel a bit like we are walking in the wilderness, can't it?

Because sometimes we face really difficult times in life. Maybe it's the fact that we live with lifelong disabilities or illness.

Maybe it's relational uncertainties. Being hurt by others, broken families, financial uncertainty. Maybe it's just lamenting the brokenness in the world around us. Maybe this is the reason why some people here this morning might feel, is God really here?

[6 : 35] Does he really care? Is he worth following? And this is especially true for Christians, actually. I know that might seem strange, but because as Christians, we are those who have been saved, and we have an amazing home to look forward to, but sometimes it still feels like we're in the desert, we're in the wilderness.

Perhaps because of the rejection we might get from family and friends for following Jesus. People making fun of us at school. Perhaps it's because we've given up things to follow Jesus.

Time, money, leisurely pursuits, so that you can be here at church this morning. In those times, we might be tempted to wonder, is following Jesus worth it?

So, what do we need to know this morning if we are to keep walking with God in the wilderness?

What do we need to know?

Well, this is what today's story is about from the Bible. Three and a half thousand years ago, God's people had been saved, miraculously.

[8 : 02] The Red Sea had been parted. They'd been saved from slavery. God had done amazing things for them, from years of oppression and frustration, and they were on a journey home to the place that God has promised them, led by Moses and Aaron.

But despite all of these good things that they had seen, how God had brought plagues on their enemies, how he'd parted the seas, how he'd even provided water for them, they now start to grumble.

If you've got a Bible in front of you, please take a look down at verse two. They've just left the place where there's luscious water and provision, and this is a month after they've left Egypt.

In the desert, the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, if only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt. There we sat by the meat pots and ate food all we wanted, but you have brought us into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.

I mean, you can see their frustration, right? They're thinking we've got this amazing land to look forward to, and now it's a desert again. So why are they now in the desert?

[9 : 41] Well, there's a few things. What do they need to know in the desert if they are to keep walking with God in this frustration that they're facing? Well, we learn a few things.

Firstly, we need to know that the Lord our God will provide. Now, to think about that, I need a few helpers.

Anyone can help me build some towers? So I need two teams. So Philip, okay. Just wait there a minute. Just wait. Anyone? Yeah, Tom? Okay. Bill?

Okay. Anyone else? Joel? Okay. Just wait, wait there. Don't do anything yet. Okay. Now, I need two teams. Okay. Maybe we have Team Diver, and then we have Philip and Joel, maybe?

And Jenny? Okay. Maybe Team Diver. Do you want to be this team? Oh, yes. You can join too. Okay. Okay.

[10 : 43] Great. Climbers versus Explorers. Great. Fantastic. Okay. So both of you, before we uncover, we've got this tower. Can you see that tower?

I want you to build me that tower with what you've got. Okay. You've got to use the bricks you've got to build that tower. Okay. Three, two, one.

Okay. Go. Okay. Okay. okay I see we can do all right no no you can't take their bricks you can't say their bricks no got to use the bricks you've got how's it going it's quite complicated tower isn't it oh we're nearly there nearly there our explorers are doing well oh there's missing a brick I think they

stole one of your bricks actually yeah but that's fine that's good enough that's good enough we'll leave it there okay okay now that was a bit unfair wasn't it why was that a bit unfair yeah so how do you feel team climbers the fact that you didn't have enough to complete the task how did you feel but sad yeah yeah it's not very good was it yeah how did you feel team explorers that you you had enough to complete the task it's pretty good yeah yeah great thank you can you go please do go have a seat and maybe give them applause well done let's leave the bricks great um now now it's a it's a silly illustration isn't it um but but it's actually a bit like the problem I think the people in the wilderness had and we sometimes have isn't it when we face um times in the wilderness because actually we're more we're more motivated to keep going if we know we will have what we need to keep going you see the p the problem that God's people had in the wilderness is that they thought they had been abandoned by God you can see this verse 2 they crumbled against Moses and Aaron but actually in verse 8

Moses and Aaron say who are we your grumbling is not against us it's against the Lord and we might think this is a bit ridiculous right they've seen all that God has done but how often do we do this when faced with difficulties in life asking the question is God really there does he really care is he going to provide what I need to keep going but God wants us to know this morning that this couldn't be further from the truth verse 12 take a look at verse 12 with me the Lord said to Moses I heard the grumbling of the Israelites tell them at twilight you will eat meat and in the morning you will be filled with bread then you will know that I am the Lord your God God promises to provide miraculously bread from heaven so that they would know that he is the Lord their God that is he is their God that is he's a God who will not abandon them he's a God who called them out of slavery how could he abandon them now he will provide he will sustain them finish the work that he started in them that he is the Lord the God who created the universe he's a God who can be completely trusted when God makes a promise to guide his people home he will act on it and what's he going to do well verse 4 says he's going to rain bread from heaven now you think if they just stumbled across some restaurants on the way there might be a temptation to say oh what a lovely coincidence just happened to stumble across food every day there might be still a reason to question is it really the Lord who's with us but so that there's no room for doubting

God says he's going to rain bread from heaven something that they don't know something that they've never seen before so that they know that only explanation is that this is something from the Lord the God who created the universe and so take a look down with me verse 13 that evening quail came and covered the camp and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp when the dew was gone thin flakes like frost on the floor ground appeared on the desert floor so this is what happened something dew like rained on the floor appeared okay and the people came up and they'd never seen this but I need some people to come up and have a look at this can some people come and have a look at what this is okay so what is it the people said in verse 15 what is it does anyone know what this is do yeah what is it anyone know what's it what is it what's it what's what's what's it yeah yeah I see that okay you might think why what's it well that's because what the people say in verse 15 is what is it and then they called it manna now manna in hebrew sounds like the word for what is it that's what they called it because they'd never seen it before something completely new right thank you you can go sit down now we might need some help later later but so Moses said this is the bread that God has given you to eat something that you have not known before so that you know it's come from God and the point of this is meant to show us it's clearly miraculous it's not something by accident and actually God provided it for them for 40 years in fact he made them keep some of it in a jar for future generations to remember that the Lord our God will provide it's not just some coincidence how much more assurance can we have now

[18 : 45] Jesus the bread from heaven has come to save us from our sins he will surely get his people home to the place where there be no more suffering or pain and so whatever you are going through this morning I know many of us are feeling low at the moment maybe tempted to feel God is distant worried that he's abandoned us know this if Jesus has called you Lord if you follow him and call upon the name of the Lord your God he will surely provide just like he did in the wilderness now we're going to sing a song now that reminds us of how the Lord is our shepherd and we shall never want he will always provide for us so let's stand and sing that together now the Lord's my shepherd Lord is our shepherd and we shall not want he makes me life in pastures free he leads me by the still still waters his goodness restores my soul and I will trust in you alone and I will trust in you alone and your endless mercy follows me your goodness will lead me home and though I walk the

darkest path I will not fear the evil one for you are with me and your rod and star and the comfort I need to know and I will trust in you alone in you alone and I will trust in you alone for your endless mercy follows me your goodness will lead me home and my cup it overflows with joy I feast on his pure delight and I will trust in you alone and my cup it overflows with joy I feast on his pure delight and I will trust in you alone and I will trust in you alone and I will trust in you alone your endless mercy your endless mercy follows me your goodness will lead me home great do you please have a seat so we've seen that the Lord our God will provide in the wilderness that isn't that amazing news in those difficult times if we are trusting in him but this passage isn't just about that actually in verse 4 God says that this is actually a test a test a test now tests help us see how much we understand how much we we know to help us learn maybe some of you have tests at school I know most of us have had tests in our life and the test is this will they live by God's words or not will they follow his instructions it says in verse 4 and the challenge is for us to do the same when we are walking in the wilderness because if we truly believe the Lord our God will provide then we will act on his words we will obey his words how many of you if you go to a doctor when you're ill and they give you a solution and perhaps the solution is to have an operation something very painful the proof of whether you trust them is whether you have the operation right you see you've got to act on the words if you really trust them if you really believe it's what's best so what do we learn from this test in the wilderness well firstly I think we learn that disobeying his word stinks so I need some actors to help me act out this bit of the story yeah come forward yeah okay so we're following along from verse 16 for those who've got a Bible open so verse 16 says this is what the Lord has commanded everyone is to take as much as they need take an omer for each person to have it in your tent so what I need you to do is gather up some of these watsits and just gather up as many as you can make sure there's enough for everyone go on Joel go on Joel you can gather up some okay okay so the Israelites did as they were told some gathered much some gathered little and when they measured it yeah that's it yeah carry it great that's great not right yet not right yet so that everyone had what they needed and when they measured it so yeah just put it in here great thank you everyone gathered as much as they needed verse 18 then Moses said to them okay so that's great so that's great that's great what do we learn from this they had loads didn't they amazing thank you thank you so many great great gathering great gathering great gathering okay we'll stop gathering for the moment we'll leave the rest there that's fine great gathering good work gathering okay just wait a minute so they obeyed God's word and they had no lack they had more than they needed right everyone had enough but then what about these they're special we can't have them so but then verse 19 Moses said to them no one is to keep any of it until morning so you're eating it nom nom nom nom nom nom okay so eat all of it however however some of them didn't eat it all some of them kept some Philip do you want to just take take some just take a handful okay yeah not to eat you're saving them until morning why might he save them until morning because then he has food for tomorrow right because you think that God won't provide tomorrow you think I'm not sure God will provide tomorrow so you think okay you know what I'm going to hold a bit back just in case but then what happened verse 20 however some of them paid no attention to Moses they kept part of it until morning but it was full of maggots and it began to smell and Moses was angry yeah it got yucky exactly yeah is that mouldy it is mouldy yeah yeah and there's actually a worm in there if you look yeah yeah yeah okay so that's what happened that's what happened they disobeyed God's word and it stinks it really stinks right now now you might think okay well that's that's just what happens right if you leave something for too long it stinks right yeah right but but so we can have no no no no so that we can we can be sure that this wasn't just a coincidence that it happens again so verse 22 says on the sixth day they gathered twice as much as they normally need and they said to them this is what the Lord commanded tomorrow is to be a Sabbath a day of rest you are to bake whatever you want to bake want to bake and boil whatever you want to boil save whatever is left and keep it till morning okay so what he's saying is now on a special day because it's going to be a holy day to God you're going to gather twice as much and it's not going to go like this okay and if you obey that it's going to be well see what happens verse 24 so they save some of it till morning and it did not stink it did not grow up maggots in it get maggots in it it was good right they had everything they needed and Moses said eat it today because today is a Sabbath to the Lord you will not find any of it on the ground today nevertheless verse 27 some went looking around for some manna in the wilderness so go looking around for some go looking around you found any?

[28 : 45] no no why didn't you find any? I have the ground why didn't you find any? because it's the Sabbath yeah yeah God right God said there won't be any today so eat those thank you disobeyed and you can imagine how frustrated they would have been right all that looking around tirelessly working and they couldn't find anything it would have been pretty rubbish right it stinks thank you very much you can sit down now give them a round of applause the point is this the Lord our God is the one who's providing it's miraculous how can it stink on one day and another day it be saved the point is God said it would happen and it happened and when we obey his words it goes well with us and when we don't it stinks now it's such a simple lesson right but we need to know this don't we because it's when life is hard that we might be tempted to question God's word tempted to disobey tempted to put our trust in perhaps how clever we are or how much money we earn or what other people think about us perhaps to lie or to cover up when we've done something bad to get revenge when someone's hurt us all these things which God says are bad if we're doing them for ourselves be stronger or make ourselves feel better but do we realise when we do all these things it stinks see these things don't go the way we hope right we think that being clever being rich being well respected will make our life better when actually the pursuit of these things often makes us feel more tired more anxious and upset lying revenge living to please ourselves they ultimately isolate us ruin our relationships destroy us and others it's no wonder we see so much brokenness in the world so much mental health problems and abuse all because people disobey God's instructions his way for our life

God's designed a good way for us to live and disobeying God's word stinks but notice in contrast verse 17 and 18 they had no lack living by God's word that is when we take God's word to heart when we follow his instructions carefully when we trust in him to provide for us we're left with no lack we experience true peace true satisfaction how freeing it is when we take God's word to heart rather than storing up riches for ourselves anxiously worrying about whether we will have enough to provide for self being able to confidently trust that the Lord our God will provide for our every need rather than burning yourself out working seven days a week being able to take a day off and trust that the Lord will provide enough time now I can testify to this in my own life and perhaps many of you can too so why not after the service or during discussion time discuss the ways you've seen the Lord provide in this way so how are we to respond to all of this live by his word of course now do we believe this this morning that living by his word really is the best thing

I don't know what you're going through this morning perhaps some of you look at life and the world around and think is God really here notice God's provision doesn't mean there will be no suffering it does not mean life will be easy God's people remained in the desert for 40 years it can't have been an easy life but the purpose was for them to learn to trust God to take him at his word and to live each day by his word and so it is for us when God feels distant the same question goes out to us this morning will we take God at his word will we as James says counted all joy when we face trials knowing that God does it to test us and complete us to make us perfect when life is filled with all consuming worries how to provide for our family will I be married do people like me at school will we live by faith rather than worrying about these things will we trust what Jesus says when he says seek first the kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well when we put God at the centre even when it feels difficult because knowing that what he says is good for us and right for us another application of this is if we understand this we will want to feed on his word each day it's no wonder that that bread was used here for this test bread in the Middle East was essential for life if you had no breath there was no bread there's no life bread is something you can't live without in the same way brothers and sisters friends here this morning

God's word is something that none of us can really live without so how are we going to take time to gather to get what we need to get by each day how are you going to make sure as families as individuals you are being fed now not all of us can make sense of God's word but that's why we have each other that's why we meet as a church every Sunday it's why we have friends and family to help us it's why we have growth groups midweek groups podcasts other amazing things you can listen to and if you're not a regular here please do come back or find another local church that teaches God's word so that you can gather what you need to live each day and you're not yet a follower of Jesus do you see that life without Jesus stinks it will ultimately never satisfy only the Lord our God our Creator who can rain bread from heaven can provide what we're really looking for and indeed he has done in Jesus the true bread from heaven

God's only provision so that we can be cleansed from our sin and walk with God in the wilderness but make it home living a life of real purpose and joy not dependent on circumstances knowing that you are never alone never abandoned deeply loved because the Lord our God will provide disobeying his word stinks but living by his word leads to no luck if you'd like to please do join with me as I as we pray together now heavenly Father we just thank you so much that you will never abandon your people thank you that you promised to provide what we need on this journey through the wilderness we're sorry that so often we doubt your goodness and we're tempted to look back and think were we better off in slavery were we better off in Egypt would you help us by faith today to live by your word and to know that you will provide because you are our God and that living by your word leads to no luck we pray these things in Jesus name

[38 : 01] Amen Great Now I think it's good living by God's word and I think it's good while we're here together before we sing the final song just to think about some of these things together perhaps with your family or with friends or people around you just discuss what you've learnt today and how you can apply it to your own life so I've got some questions on the screen here what situations might it be difficult to trust in God's provision how does this story in Exodus 16 encourage us to live by God's word this real story from history and what would it look like for us this week so perhaps five minutes and then we'll sing our final song together our final song together when you confirmed it after we didn't really have an action though until the stars appeared they didn't know anything about north east there wasn't any compasses in those days yeah yeah so what do you think about what situations might be hard to trust in God's provision that God sent them into this big open space where there was nothing provided yeah that's right and then all of a sudden he sent this bread down to them yeah and they didn't take as much as they needed but to be sensible was it and make it last for as long as they need them to over next day yeah what about for us are there situations in our life that we might find it hard yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah