



# BETHANY EASTSIDE LENT DEVOTIONAL

2021

## **Formed in the Wilderness**

Exodus 15, 16, 20, 32

We've all heard the term 'the before times' as it relates to the pandemic. For the people of Israel, the 'before times' were marked by captivity, enslavement, and oppression. Then, they were miraculously set free. A new kind of crucible awaited them as they followed Moses, the leader of God's people, out of 'before time' and into the unknown freedom of the wilderness. They had to re-assess their relationship with God, and therefore, how they saw themselves in the world. As our community prepares for our emergence from the pandemic, we want to become more prepared for the life God would have for us in the future by looking at the story of Israel, the Exodus, and how their relationship to their God was re-established through the fire and trials of a generation's span of wandering in the wilderness.

## February 21 - Exodus 15:22-27, 'First Steps of the New Journey'

Author: Travis Fletcher

*We see the Israelites take their first steps into this new journey with God - what will life be like now that they're no longer enslaved people in Egypt? One thing that is immediately clear - God will provide.*

**22** Then Moses ordered Israel to set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. **23** When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter. That is why it was called Marah. **24** And the people complained against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" **25** He cried out to the Lord; and the Lord showed him a piece of wood; he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet.

There the Lord made for them a statute and an ordinance and there he put them to the test. **26** He said, "If you will listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God, and do what is right in his sight, and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians; for I am the Lord who heals you."

**27** Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees; and they camped there by the water.

### Reflection

Think back to a time when you needed God to provide for you. Write it down. It's good to recognize that everything we have comes from God, and yet, in the story of Israel, it's hardly ever about one person being gifted something from the Lord. God provides abundantly for His community (Psalm 145). In this passage, the people need water, and God provides. However, even though they see the water, they don't receive it as the gift it is from God. Participating in a miracle, Moses helps them see the gift for what it is. Eventually, God leads the people to more water than they can drink (v. 27), showing once again that He is our ultimate provider. During this season of Lent, let's thank God in advance for His provision. Let's demonstrate God's abundant love and provision by blessing others and truly seeing the gifts God has given to us for His glory.

### Prayer

Almighty God, you are our provider! All of creation is upheld and animated by your power. We fail to trust you, and our lame attempts at self-provision create anxiety, fear, and isolation from you. Forgive us, and help us to take time daily in the week ahead to both ask for your provision for ourselves and others, and to thank you in advance for what you will bring. May we be a generous people because you were first generous to us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## February 28 - Exodus 16:1-15 - Testing and Commitment

Author: Maddie Graham

*God will provide, and He won't just meet people's physical needs (food, water, shelter, etc.). He will meet people in such a way that charts a course toward devoting their lives to Him.*

The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. **2** The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. **3** The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

**4** Then the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. **5** On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days." **6** So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, **7** and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your complaining against the Lord. For what are we, that you complain against us?" **8** And Moses said, "When the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the Lord has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the Lord."

**9** Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining.'" **10** And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. **11** The Lord spoke to Moses and said, **12** "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.'"

**13** In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. **14** When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. **15** When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat."

## Reflection

This last year we have all been walking through the wilderness, crying out to God, wondering where He is, and questioning if we are on the right trail. We complain because the path is rough. We've been tripping over rocks and roots, been scraped by branches, and we just want to know when the

dense forest will open up to green pastures again. During these times, remember that the Lord will provide. He sees you in your distress and He has wonderful plans of provision for you. Even in the midst of the wilderness, notice the wildflowers and other small blessings He's left along the path, just for you to see, to be reminded of His faithfulness.

### Prayer

Dear Lord, Thank You that You are a God who provides. You see us and know our needs and Your timing is perfect. Help us to be patient and trust that not only will You satisfy our physical needs, but You will draw us ever closer to You. Thank You that You meet us where we are and hear our prayers. Let us be blown away by Your grace and abundant love, so filled with gratitude that we cannot help but praise You and draw closer to You. We love You, O Lord our strength and song. In Your name we pray, Lord, Amen.

## March 7 - Exodus 16:15-30 - Push and Pull

Author: Elizabeth Hensley

*God provides, and Israel blithely tests God's limits and patience.*

**15** When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat. **16** This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.’” **17** The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. **18** But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed. **19** And Moses said to them, “Let no one leave any of it over until morning.” **20** But they did not listen to Moses; some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul. And Moses was angry with them. **21** Morning by morning they gathered it, as much as each needed; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.

**22** On the sixth day they gathered twice as much food, two omers apiece. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, **23** he said to them, “This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord; bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning.’” **24** So they put it aside until morning, as Moses commanded them; and it did not become foul, and there were no worms in it. **25** Moses said, “Eat it today, for today is a sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field. **26** Six days you shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is a sabbath, there will be none.”

**27** On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, and they found none. **28** The Lord said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and instructions? **29** See! The Lord has given you the sabbath, therefore on the sixth day he gives you food for two days; each of you stay where you are; do not leave your place on the seventh day.” **30** So the people rested on the seventh day.

## Reflection

During this time in the wilderness, God revealed who He is to His people—a provider, a shield, one whose love is unfailing. God’s revelation of Himself is such an incredible gift.

It takes incredible patience to gently remind people you love of who you are, over and over. We *think* we know the whole story of who God is, but 1 Cor. 13:12 reminds us that we only know in part. We must trust in God despite our limited understanding, and remain humble in the face of something so much greater than ourselves. Going through trials is an opportunity to refine our understanding of who God is. He already knows. He already sees the end from the beginning. *By walking with us through these trials, He shows us the things that He has already seen.* He shows us acts of kindness, He shows us faith, He shows us how He is strengthening us so that we can help others (shout out to

Romans 5:1-5). God's provision doesn't always look obvious. Sometimes we see it and ask "What is it?" like the Israelites did with the manna. These moments are a gift too because they remind us that He gives us exactly what we need, whether we know it or not.

### Prayer

Dear God, thank you for being faithful. Thank you for your steadfast love in the face of our uncertainty. I pray that we would remember your blessings every morning and reflect on your mercy every night. Please heal the places in us that are broken and frayed so that we are made whole. Grant us peace in our hearts and show us how to bring your peace into our world. May you fill us with your Holy Spirit and refresh our minds so that your light shines out of us into our community. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## **March 14 - Exodus 20:1-6 - Worship and Commitment**

*God's 'jealousy' can best be understood as His unfailing commitment to His people.*

Author: Christina Medawar

**1** Then God spoke all these words:

**2** I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; **3** you shall have no other gods before me.

**4** You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. **5** You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, **6** but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

### Reflection

Even though Israel was God's chosen people, they often strayed from Him, allowing their fear and mistrust to step in front of their love for Him. God told them, as He tells us today, that His holiness demands our whole hearts. In a similar way, we faithlessly forget to honor Him, yet God pursues us with infinite love and mercy. His jealousy for us is passionate. Isn't it amazing that *Elohim*—the one, powerful Lord of the universe—seeks us out and longs for an intimate relationship with us? During this season, let us respond by actively acknowledging Him as our Lord and by asking the Holy Spirit to increase our desire for Him.

### Prayer

Dear Lord, Thank you for your passionate and faithful love for us. Forgive us as we consistently let our worries and fears take precedence over You in our lives. Open our eyes to your glory and let us respond with awe-filled worship. Remind us of the daily decision we make to follow You and fill us with joy as we begin to know you deeper. We want to experience you each and every day. Thank you for your never-failing patience and help us to “fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2).

### **March 21 - Exodus 20:7-17 - Trust and Vulnerability**

*Our relationship with God inherently changes the way we relate to others.*

Author: Ian Ferguson

**8** Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. **9** Six days you shall labor and do all your work. **10** But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. **11** For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

**12** Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

**13** You shall not murder.

**14** You shall not commit adultery.

**15** You shall not steal.

**16** You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

**17** You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

**18** When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance,

### Reflection

After rescuing them from captivity, God wanted to shape the people of Israel into a holy nation that would be an example of His redeeming love to the whole world. But the Israelites struggled to overcome their sinful nature, so God gave them rules to follow to govern their outward behavior while He worked on their inward character. Read through each commandment carefully and consider what it reveals about what God values. What do those values teach us about God's character? How would our attitudes and behaviors toward other people change if we moved from following a list of rules to living a set of values?

### Prayer

Dear Lord, we confess that we fall short of your perfect standard. We confess that we focus on policing minute behaviors, but neglect the larger values of justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Thank you



for your unfailing mercy and love that rescues us from the darkness again and again. We ask that you shape our hearts to be more like yours. Give us the wisdom to see others the way that you do and the strength to love others as you love us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## **March 28 - Exodus 32, Matt. 21:1-10 - Palm Sunday**

*Jesus enters Jerusalem as both a triumphant leader and a man facing the darkest hours of his life. We need both to understand the immensity of his sacrifice on the cross and the depth of his love and commitment to each of us.*

Author: Vincent Lee

**1** When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, **2** saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. **3** If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.” **4** This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

**5**

“Tell the daughter of Zion,

Look, your king is coming to you,

humble, and mounted on a donkey,

and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

**6** The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; **7** they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. **8** A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. **9** The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

**10** When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?”

## Reflection

The past year has altered the rhythms of our lives. We have suffered hardships and separation from friends and family. We live in a world full of anxiety about the present and uncertainty for the future. Yet, in these difficult times, we endure knowing that Jesus will come in our time of need to lead us out of our wilderness. He willingly went to suffer what we suffer and bore that upon himself through death on the Cross. How immense was his love for us to make such an act?

In antiquity, triumphant entries were celebrated by conquering generals. What a paradox he must have seemed to the people, arriving on a donkey. Though Jesus did not come dressed as one, he conquered nothing less than death and sin upon the Cross! During this season of Lent let us reflect on Jesus' amazing love for us and acknowledge the great sacrifice he made on our behalf.

### Prayer

Heavenly Father, How amazing is it that you sent your only Son to us, to suffer what we do, to endure our pains and our hardships, and to bear all that upon himself on the Cross out of a love for us. Though we are often forgetful and hard-hearted, you never forget us and have plans and made provisions for us. We confess that we have done nothing to deserve this love and acknowledge and thank you for your grace by which we are saved. In Jesus' name, Amen!

## **April 2 - Good Friday**

Author: Alanna Kraft

*For this special Scripture reading, please select one (or several) of the gospel accounts of Jesus' crucifixion and death. As you read, reflect on the theme of provision. God provided for the people of Israel throughout their wilderness journey, and it was beautiful and life-giving. In Jesus' suffering and death, God provides yet again - although this time, it's through pain, rejection, and abandonment.*

*Scriptures: Mark 15:16-47, Matthew 27:27-66, Luke 23:26-56, John 19:17-42*

### Reflection

What is it?' Imagine what prompted the Israelites to react this way to the Manna in Exodus 16. Fear? Disgust? Disappointment? Uncertainty? How often do we miss God's provision because we don't recognize it for what it is? Looking back on this year, what are some ways God provided you with what you needed that perhaps you didn't recognize as His provision at the time? Do we see this on the Cross of Christ - provision that (initially) went totally unrecognized? How does knowing that Jesus is your Bread of Life allow you to rest - spiritually and physically? Consider ending your reflection time by taking communion; abiding in Him through the sacraments.

### Prayer

God, thank you for providing for our needs again and again, even when we don't realize it or it doesn't look how we expect it to. Feed us with Yourself today and let us abide in You through Jesus, our Bread of Life. Open our eyes to the ways that You are working in and around us. Let our trust in You deepen. Help us to rest, expectant for Your provision. Thank you for going to the cross for each of us. In your name, Amen.

## **April 4 - Matthew 28:1-10 - EASTER!**

*God continues His trajectory of faithfulness, walking with the Israelites through their darkest hours and then, centuries later, setting up His son, not for failure, but instead to provide the ultimate gift of freedom and salvation.*

Author: Travis Fletcher

**28** Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb.

**2** Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. **3** His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. **4** The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint.

**5** Then the angel spoke to the women. “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. **6** He isn’t here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying. **7** And now, go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and he is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there. Remember what I have told you.”

**8** The women ran quickly from the tomb. They were very frightened but also filled with great joy, and they rushed to give the disciples the angel’s message. **9** And as they went, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they ran to him, grasped his feet, and worshiped him. **10** Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t be afraid! Go tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there.”

### Reflection

If given the option, I feel confident that the Israelites would not have chosen the path through the wilderness. ‘Give us something easier,’ they might have asked, but the choice was never theirs to make. Jesus’ choice—to ‘drink the cup of suffering’ for each of us—is a decision by one person to carry the sins of all people for all time. He made the choice for each of us, and through his redemption, we can experience renewal of our souls, healing in our families, and the ending of injustice around our world. God shows up, yet again, in the empty tomb of Easter morning!

### Prayer

Jesus, thank you for your faithfulness, for saying ‘yes’ to the cross and to death, so that we might experience life to the fullest. Everything you said you would do, you did. Everyone who calls on your name can be rescued. Thank you. This Easter, help us call on your name in new ways, and may more people come into a saving relationship with you. We ask in your great name, Amen.