

Forty Years in a Desert



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Although the title does not sound very encouraging, there are examples, lessons, and encouragement in the message, because a desert is where we learn to trust God and God alone. Many of God's blessings come to us wrapped in unpleasant-looking packages, but later when the wrapping is removed, they prove to be spiritually valuable beyond words to describe.

Many Christians have experienced God's presence and blessings—spiritually, financially, with physical healing, change of attitudes in loved ones, and receiving answers to prayer in various other aspects of the Christian life. There are other times, however, when those blessings just seem to stop, and desert-like conditions are experienced.

This is distressing at any time, but if this happens early in our Christian walk, the devil can use such times to discourage us, and suggesting that we committed some serious sin which has caused the condition. There are times when we may not see any tangible blessings, and are perplexed, but there are reasons why God allows us to experience desert conditions.

Our primary need is not the spiritual, physical, and financial blessings we desire, but it is a personal relationship with God—that is the one thing that counts above everything else. If we are going through a desert-like condition, we could be depending on a past experience, instead of drawing on God each day for a fresh supply of the blessings we need. Desert places compel us

to deal with God, and they include a new knowledge of Him that is received in no other way.

Maintaining our trust on God through any desert-like experience, will bring about the death of self in us, which then leads to a true preparation for eternal life—that is more valuable than anything else. It is always enlightening and inspiring to read how God dealt with His people in the Bible.

Israel went through desert experiences, and 1 Corinthians 10:11 *"All these events happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us, who live at the time when this [world] is drawing to a close."*

God first allowed the living conditions for His people to be unbearable in Egypt. If this had not been that way, and if living conditions were ideal, they would have stayed in Egypt for the rest of their lives. The devil was allowed to bring about dreadful working conditions for them, because Israel was depending on human plans and methods. Conditions became intolerable, and they would have done anything to get free. This was all part of God's plan to keep His Truth alive.

God enabled them to get free from Egyptian slavery by great signs and wonders, and they came to the Red Sea. Satan inspired Pharaoh and his army to pursue them, but this was all in divine order. Israel just wanted to get away from Egypt, but now they faced a massive expanse of water, with no human way to escape.

God then opened a passageway through the sea, which enabled them to put distance between them and the Egyptian army. The Israelites did not know what awaited them on the other side, but they were glad to get away from the present danger and the horrendous conditions in Egypt.

After reaching the other side, the passageway closed up, and they found themselves in a desert!

This huge number of people—infants, middle-age, and seniors—soon realized that there were no stores to purchase anything, and no fertile ground to plant crops. There was absolutely no way to buy a loaf of bread or a quart of milk. God took them to this desert to prove to them, and everyone after them, that He is all anyone really needs.

It made no difference how difficult the natural conditions were, because human conditions do not count with God. When every human source of help or supply or information is shut off, we are compelled to trust God for everything we need. Forty years in a desert proved that God was equal to the task, and He supplied all the needs of over two million people.

The trivial desert-like places we pass through from time to time just proves that God is greater than any other source of supply. God has far more than what we gave up for the sake of His kingdom. God is with us today, so we can be sure of being supplied with everything we need, and to have a better quality of material, spiritual, physical, and financial blessings than we had before.

Every time we trust God alone for a fresh supply of something, the way of self diminishes, and our knowledge of God increases. Israel first lacked water, but instead of going to God, they searched for three days before finding brackish water that was unfit to drink. This bitter experience was a Marah. They were slowing dying of thirst, which seemed cruel, but it gave Moses the opportunity to place the matter before God in prayer.

The situation quickly changed—revealing how all-sufficient and resourceful God is—even under the most difficult of circumstances. Locating drinkable water seemed impossible, but as Jesus said Matthew 19:26 *"With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible."*

When Moses prayed unto God ^{Exodus 15:25} “*the LORD showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet. There He made a statute and an ordinance for them, and there He tested them.*” It was not the wood that changed the water, but the divine power of God. The Lord just used that desert place to reveal Himself to the people—that was spiritually valuable. They not only had water, they had God as their Great Physician.

God said ²⁶, “*If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you.*” Every trial we go through in God’s way, by faith in Him alone, just proves how loving, merciful, and all sufficient He really is.

God had said ^{Deuteronomy 8:2-3} “*You shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.*”

“*So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.*” That desert place was to teach them how to depend on God.

All during this time in a desert, God protected them, and even preserved their clothing in a miraculous way. ⁴⁻⁵ “*Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the LORD your God chastens you.*” It was just a teaching opportunity for God, if they would listen and learn.

If they would be patient and persist in faith, the promises of their God would be fulfilled. ^{Deuteronomy 8:7-9} “*For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper.*”

Great blessings, and a better knowledge of God, come from holding onto our faith, and allowing Him to supply our need. We must not accept any other deliverance or any substitute for God. Jesus told a parable and said ^{Luke 18:1} “*that men always ought to pray and not lose heart.*” He went on to tell about an unbelieving judge and a widow who needed an answer from him.

The judge kept putting her off, because he did not fear God, and had no regard for anyone else. He later reasons, however ^{Luke 18:5} “*because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.*”

⁶⁻⁸ The Lord Jesus then tells us, “*Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily.*” If we will persist in trusting God, He will deliver us without delay.

The woman of Canaan needed healing for her daughter. The two points in both examples are to first burn any bridge of retreat back to self, and second to use Scripture to claim our victory. The woman said ^{Matthew 15:22-23} “*Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.*’ But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, “*Send her away, for she cries out after us.*”

Even though Jesus replied ²⁴ “*I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,*” she would not leave without an answer. ²⁵ “*She came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Lord, help me!’*” A second discouraging reply from the Lord still did not change her persistence.

He says ^{Matthew 15:26} “*It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.*” He meant the same relationship exists between the woman and Him, as between a strange man and a stray dog. That is the only basis she had for her claim—the right a stray dog has to beg something from a stranger. ²⁷ She says, “*Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.*”

The reply of the Lord is the message for us. He said ²⁸ “*‘O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.’ And her daughter was healed from that very hour.*” She went home and met her daughter fully delivered. Jesus then applies the principle to us.

We are to make a definite decision not to seek help from anyone but God, and to make our claim on the authority of God’s written Word. ^{Romans 10:8} “*‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith which we preach).*”

We are to make a final decision to trust God in faith, and to base our claim on the shed Blood of Jesus Christ, until the victory is received. ^{2 Corinthians 1:20} “*For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.*” Desert places of trust can bring about marvelous answers to prayer—just like God did for His people all through the Bible.



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