

Desert Experiences in the Christian Life

Exodus 3:1 (The Back of the Desert)

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

Desert times are when God seems to be curtailing our enjoyment of earthly or secular things in order to teach us the spiritual lessons that He knows we need to learn.

Some translations tend to use "Wilderness" instead of "Desert," so for the purposes of this discussion, we will consider these terms more or less synonymous.

Acts 7:17-36 (Moses—Preparatory)

As you know, God agreed to give Abraham's offspring the Promised Land after 400 years of oppression in the Land of Egypt. Joseph brought them to Egypt during a terrible famine.

Acts 7:17-36

¹⁷ "But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt ¹⁸ till another king arose who did not know Joseph. ¹⁹ This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live. ²⁰ At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father's house for three months. ²¹ But when he was set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. ²² And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.

Moses spent the first forty years of his life learning to be somebody great

But he was also learning how to behave in Pharaoh's court so he could lead the Lord's people.

²³ "Now when he was **forty years** old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. ²⁴ And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. ²⁵ For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand. ²⁶ And the next day he appeared to two of them as they were fighting, and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?' ²⁷ But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?' ²⁸ Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?' ²⁹ Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons.

Moses spent the second forty years of his life in the desert learning to be nobody but Moses

But he was also learning how to survive in the desert so he could lead the Lord's people.

³⁰ "And when **forty years** had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. ³¹ When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him, ³² saying, 'I am the God of your fathers — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and dared not look. ³³ Then the LORD said to him, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. ³⁴ I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt."

³⁵ "This Moses whom they rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush. ³⁶ He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness **forty years**.

Moses spent the last forty years of his life leading the Lord's People out of the slavery of Egypt, through the desert, and into the Promised Land

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

⁷ And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted

above measure. ⁸ Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. ⁹ And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Exodus 32-33 (The Whole Congregation of the Lord's People—Being Disciplined)

While Moses was on the Mountain getting the Law, the Children of Israel set up a golden calf to be their God. God said He was going to destroy them, but Moses interceded for the people.

God did not destroy them, but said He'd send his angel to the Promised Land with them
Moses plead for them until God relented and promised to go with them Himself.

& Numbers 14

When the Children of Israel got to the border of the Promised Land, they chickened out because there were giants in the Land.

Numbers 14:20-24

²⁰ Then the LORD said: "I have pardoned, according to your word; ²¹ but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD — ²² because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, ²³ they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it. ²⁴ But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it. ²⁵ Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites dwell in the valley; tomorrow turn and move out into the wilderness by the Way of the Red Sea."

God sentenced them to forty years of wandering in the desert until all those responsible for their lack of faith had died.

Still, God never forsook them, but was with them all the way through their punishment

We can count on God's presence with us on even in the desert

Hebrews 12:5b-11

^{5b} "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD,
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;
⁶ For whom the LORD loves He chastens,
And scourges every son whom He receives."

⁷ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ⁸ But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. ⁹ Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. ¹¹ Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Matthew 4 1-11 (Jesus in the Desert –The Proving Ground)

Matthew 4:1-11

¹ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. ³ Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

⁴ But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

⁵ Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written:

'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"

⁷ Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'"

⁸ Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."

¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"

¹¹ Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

The Lord's time in the desert was entirely to demonstrate that He was sinless.

Because He was Sinless, He could be our Savior

1 Peter 1:6-8

⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

Acts 9:1-19 (Gives the details of the Apostle Paul's conversion to Christ—Learning)

He fell down before the Lord when saw a bright light as the Lord spoke to him.

He was led into Damascus as a blind man where he had to wait for three days

Ananias was sent to heal him of his blindness

When Ananias objected, the Lord said that Paul was a chosen vessel to bring His name to the Gentiles, kings, and the nation of Israel

But before Paul could be the preacher God intended him to be, he needed a learning experience in the desert.

Galatians 1:11-12

^{11b} the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. ¹² For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ

Galatians 1:15-18

¹⁵ But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, ¹⁶ to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. ¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem.

Paul had to learn the gospel which he was to preach directly from the Lord in the Arabian Desert. And he didn't get it by rubbing Aladdin's lamp, either.

Acts 8:26-38 (Philip's Desert Experience—Where the Work Needed to be Done)

Acts 8:26-33

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert. ²⁷ So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹ Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot."

³⁰ So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

³¹ And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² The place in the Scripture which he read was this:

"He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent,

So He opened not His mouth.

³³ In His humiliation His justice was taken away, And who will declare His generation?

For His life is taken from the earth."

³⁴ So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. ³⁶ Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?"

³⁷ Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

³⁸ So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. ³⁹ Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.

⁴⁰ But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.

Philip was sent to the desert simply because that's where the eunuch was

Acts 16:6-10

⁶ Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. ⁷ After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. ⁸ So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. ⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.

So, what have we learned about Back-of-the-desert experiences:

They are spiritual experiences in hard times designed by God for our benefit

They may be preparatory—homework in the school of the Lord

They may be disciplinary--time-outs, if you will

They may be times of testing or proving—To demonstrate our spiritual maturity

They may be for our learning—Classwork in the Lord's school

They may be because that's where the Lord needs us at the moment

They may simply be for some purpose of the Lord that we won't understand in this life

God might place us in desert conditions simply to accomplish His will through our circumstances.

John 9:1-3

¹ Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. ² And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

³ Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him

Whatever the reason for our times in the desert:

We can make them times of victory or times of defeat

We can serve the Lord just as well in the back of the desert as anywhere else.

The Back of the Desert

(Exodus 2:11-3:1)

The back of the desert's a difficult place
Where God sends His servants to learn of His grace;
Where earthly distractions are easily ignored;
And life would seem pointless apart from the Lord.
Sometimes it is barren, sometimes it is bleak;
It's often unpleasant, and can be unique,
But if we endure it the way that we should
The final result is the color of good.

(Acts 7:17-36)

Though Moses was raised in the house of the king,
And learned how to do the political thing,
God made him a shepherd where pastures were poor,
So he'd be at ease on the desert's hot floor.
Forty years in the palace, forty years in the sand,
And finally forty as first in command,
To lead the Lord's people to freedom abroad
Through what he had learned in the college of God.

(1 Kings 17 & 18)

Elijah the prophet's a similar case;
He criticized Ahab the king to his face;
And God hid his servant where Ahab wouldn't look,
And made the birds bring him his food by the brook.
And when the brook failed him because of the drought,
God sent him to Zidon where he could hide out,
While God demonstrated that he could depend
On what He could do from the start to the end.

(Daniel 1:8 and Genesis 39 & 40, Matthew 11:1-6 and Acts 25:11 & 26:32)

Remember when Daniel was carried away
He served the Lord faithfully day after day;
And Joseph was jailed through no fault of his own
But served his companions with scarcely a groan.
So don't be like John when he let his faith fail,
And questioned the Lord from his cell in the jail;
Or Paul whose impetuous words seem to be
What kept him in jail when he could have gone free;

So when your wheels spin but you're getting nowhere,
It might simply mean that the Lord put you there;
And though you are stuck in the desert of God
He'll never desert you on enemy sod.
Be faithful, the Lord's desert lessons just last
Until He is satisfied that we have passed.
And if you're determined to serve Him indeed
He'll give you the strength and the courage you need.

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