

Why God Sends You Through a Season in the Desert

“He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you *so that in the end it might go well with you*” (Deut. 8:16).

Moses is reviewing with the people how God’s care has been evident as they wandered through the desert toward the promise. Read it for yourself.

“Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you. Observe the commands of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and revering him. For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills. When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will

become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you. You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today" (Deut. 8:2–18).

The people had some trying times. Desert years are no picnic. In those years, though big in population, they were small in power. No land. No home. No houses. No fields of their own. Like the patriarchs before them, they were living in tents and wandering. They wandered in circles with the Promised Land just out of reach.

Yet, when they looked back, they could see the hand of God ever present. In the moment, they found plenty to grumble about as they journeyed. They did not always feel the presence and power of God as they wandered. But in hindsight His provision was clear. Did they think they were wandering? Hindsight revealed that God was leading them. Did they think they were deprived because they lived with a day's provision at a time?

Hindsight revealed that daily provision meant they were rich and well supplied. Did they feel that they had to wear the same old clothes for years and years? Hindsight revealed that their clothes stayed new, so really they had new clothes every day. Did they resent the long, arduous walk through "that vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land?" Yet, hindsight reveals that with all that walking, their feet never swelled. They might have been carried, as far as the condition of their feet goes.

In those years, for the most part, they repeated the same obedience day after day with no hint that it really mattered. Manna, quail, cloud, fire. Worship, offer sacrifices, pack, unpack. Set up camp, take down camp. Over and over.

No change on the horizon. No evidence of the Promised Land anywhere in sight. Obedience by obedience, they followed the Lord.

Small acts of faithfulness every day for 40 years. As Moses recounts it and refreshes their memories, he doesn't softsoap the hard edges. It was tough. It was vast and terrible.

He reminds them how it felt because they are about to enter the Promised Land and leave the thirsty and waterless land behind. The abundant living in the Promised Land has been prefaced by the long walk in the dry desert. Why?

During their extended training in the desert, they learned by experience to trust the hand of God. For example, He fed them with manna day by day. If God had not sent the day's manna, they would have starved in the wilderness. Every morning required confidence in God's provision. See how Moses warns them to remember the desert days when they get into the Promised Land?

Moses says that all this training and desert traveling was "so that in the end it may go well with you." Have you ever known anyone who achieved all they ever dreamed of, then lost it all through their own actions and choices? Moses tells the people that not only is God about to release the fullness of the promise into their lives, but He has prepared their hearts to live large in the abundance of His provision.

Small Change

In some areas of your life, you have moved into the Promised Land and are living large. Look around and remember on purpose that God is the provider and sustainer. In some areas of your

life, you are on a desert walk. When you feel the desert's heat, step back mentally and look for how God's provision is evident. Today, find one thing that you will thank God for instead of complaining about. Pray: "Do Your work, Refiner's Fire, that in the end it may go well for me."

*Excerpt from The Power of Small by **Jennifer Kennedy Dean**.*