

## Baptism in Scripture

- To get a better understanding of the word baptism in the Bible, we need to trace a design pattern that runs throughout the Bible.
- Design patterns are repeated images, ideas, or events that weave through different stories in the biblical story. They are the main way that the biblical authors unify the hundreds of stories in the Bible. And every pattern develops a core theme that leads to Jesus.
- The design pattern here is God providing salvation for his people through the waters. This theme of salvation through the waters leads up to the stories of Jesus' baptism and the development of baptism in early Christianity.

# Baptism in Scripture

- Genesis 1 gives us a fundamental portrait of the world. God brings order to chaos by acts of separating. On page one of the Hebrew Bible, God's Spirit hovers over the dark, cosmic waters of "wild and waste" (Hebrew, *tohu va vohu*) that make life and human communities impossible. God separates the dark chaotic waters, and he creates a space where life can flourish (Genesis 1:1-2).
- God's work begins with multiple acts of separating. He separates the light from the darkness (Genesis 1:3-5), the waters above from the waters below (1:6-8); and the seas from the dry land by gathering the waters together. Dry land (including Eden) emerges from the chaotic waters. By bringing the place of life up out of these chaotic waters, God brings humanity into a new world.
- But in Genesis 3, humanity unleashes chaos back into the world, and what we begin to see is a replaying of the pattern of God separating the waters. However, instead of creating order through acts of separating, we now see God rescuing a remnant to pass through the waters. This remnant will now emerge out the other side to inhabit a new creation.
- The pattern begins with God's purpose, but once humanity disrupts this purpose, the pattern becomes an act of rescue.

# Baptism in Scripture

- **Noah:** Genesis 6-8 | The flood is presented as a state of "de-creation." The springs of the cosmic deep water (Heb. *tehom*) split (Heb. *baqa*), and the windows of the heavens are opened, reversing days two and three of creation (Genesis 7:11). Every being is wiped away from the face of the earth, undoing all the inhabitants from days five and six of creation (Genesis 7:22-23). But God remembers Noah (8:1), and he rescues a remnant—Noah and his family—through the waters. Noah and his family are saved through the chaotic waters and step onto dry land to begin a "humanity 2.0" in a new creation.
- **Moses:** In the book of Exodus, we are introduced to Moses, who is delivered through the waters of death in an ark and into the house of Pharaoh (Exodus 2). God saves his chosen people from Egypt by leading them through the waters of the Red Sea and onto dry land (Exodus 14:16). The Israelites are delivered from slavery and death through the waters and to Mount Sinai, where they are invited to become God's representatives to the nations.

# Baptism in Scripture

- **Joshua:** The pattern picks up again 40 years after the Exodus. The Israelites have wandered in the desert, and now the new generation is preparing to enter the promised land. The Israelites spend the night at the Jordan River before finally entering the land.
- Even though the Israelites are not in danger, we still see the “salvation template,” or pattern, playing out. God brings the people out of the wilderness and they, once again, cross through the waters to the place that God has prepared for them. The priests are instructed to carry the ark of the covenant across the Jordan River (Joshua 3:2-4).
- As the priestly representatives, they enter into the waters first, and what is true of them becomes true of the rest who follow. As the priests' feet touch the river, the waters of the Jordan “stood in a single heap,” and the Israelites cross the river on dry ground

# Baptism in Scripture

- **Isaiah:** Uses the metaphor of life emerging from chaos waters, but he does so in a way that links this imagery to a future rescue from exile by a messianic king. Years later in Israel's story, after failed monarchs and divided kingdoms, the prophet Isaiah spoke of a future promise in the midst of destruction and exile (Isaiah 11). He said that there would come a day when a new king from David's line would be endowed by the Spirit to bring justice to the poor (11:1-5).
  - God will use his arm—like in the Exodus—to lift up a banner to the nations, the king from the line of David. And the remnant will come from among the nations, passing through the waters. And there will be a safe passageway for the remnant, just like there was for Israel on the day they came up from the land of Egypt.
  - Isaiah is using this story in an analogous way to say that God will rescue his scattered nation of Israel from the “chaotic waters” of exile among the nations. The remnant will be rescued from exile and they will sing a new song of salvation (Isaiah 12:2b and Exodus 15:2).

# Baptism in Scripture

- **John the Baptist:** In the New Testament, the pattern of salvation through the waters begins with a man named John the Baptist.
- John the Baptist is a prophet who fulfills the prophetic announcement of Israel's restoration ([Isaiah 40:1-5](#); [Matthew 3:1-4](#)). And we are told that John is proclaiming the coming of the Messiah, calling for repentance, and baptizing Israelites from Jerusalem and the surrounding regions in the Jordan River ([Matthew 3:5-6](#)).
- This is a very intentional prophetic act. John is having the people pass through the waters to renew their commitment to the God of Israel. Just as the Israelites were led through the waters of the Jordan under Joshua's leadership ([Joshua 3:2-4](#)), the people were once again going through the waters of the Jordan with another prophetic leader and ushering in the fulfillment of Israel's new restoration and deliverance ([Isaiah 11:15](#); [Isaiah 43:2](#); [Isaiah 43:16-17](#); [Isaiah 44:27-28](#); [Isaiah 50:2](#); [Isaiah 51:9-11](#)).
- It's another replaying of the Exodus. As they pass through the waters, they repent of Israel's faithlessness and covenantal compromise and prepare to be the new Israel that God is going to form when the promised Messiah arrives.

# Jesus' Baptism

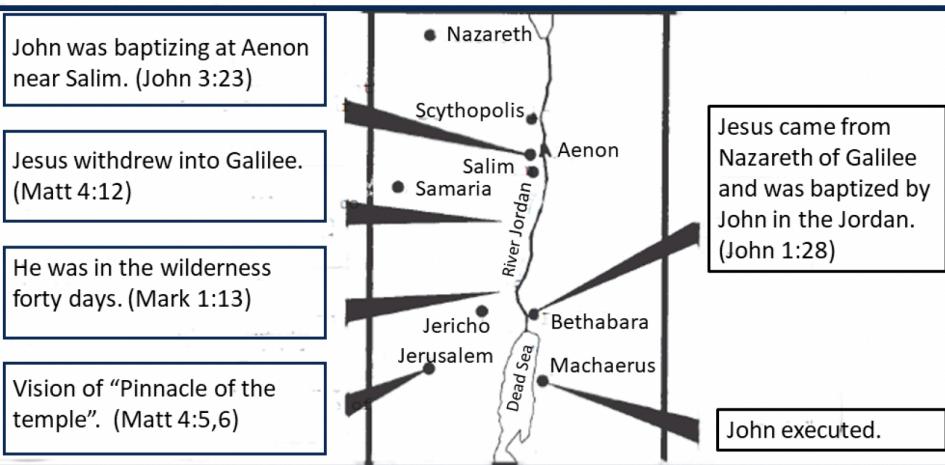
- In approximately 26 AD, Jesus goes from Galilee to Bethany, on the Eastern side of the Jordan River in order to "fulfill all righteousness" ([Matt 3:15](#), [John 1:19-28](#))
- Jesus identifies with the lost human race by becoming one with our sin and offering himself to God on our behalf
- He will later refer to his coming death as a baptism yet to be endured ([Mark 10:38](#), [Luke 12:49-50](#))
- He begins His ministry with a confession of sins that were not his own and ended His ministry with a death for sins that were not His own

# Baptism in Scripture

- **Jesus:** Each of the Synoptic Gospel accounts highlights the story of Jesus going down to the Jordan River to be baptized. In Jesus' baptism, he goes into the waters and back out again
- *In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Immediately coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him; and a voice came out of the heavens: "You are my beloved son, in you I am well pleased." (Mark 1:9-11).*
- Immediately, the pattern reemerges through Mark's language "in the Jordan," alluding to the story in Joshua (Joshua 3-4). "Out of the water" echoes back to the pattern of "through the waters" (Exodus 14:29). The heavens "open" or "split" open—referring back to the acts of separation at creation and the floodgates of the skies opening in the story of Noah (Genesis 1:6-8; Genesis 7:11). The "Spirit like a dove" descends upon Jesus, again pointing back to the Spirit hovering over the waters at creation and Noah sending out a dove after the flood (Genesis 1:2; Genesis 8:8). And God's words to Jesus, "You are my beloved son," echo his words to Moses in reference to the Israelites (Exodus 4:22-23).
- This isn't by accident. The biblical authors are continuing to weave key threads and theological themes together that are developed from the beginning of the story to its end.

## The Baptism of Jesus and the Sojourn in the Desert

***The Baptism of Christ***  
Matthew 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22



## Jesus' Temptation

### (Matt 4:1–11; Mark 1:9–12, 13; Luke 4:1–13)

- The second major experience that inducted Christ into His public ministry was His temptation immediately after His baptism. In the wildlands, Jesus meets a deceiver called "the devil" (Greek: *diabolos*, also called "the Satan" or "adversary"), who tries to trap Jesus with clever words.
  - This temptation was undoubtedly ordained by God, as Jesus was "led by the Spirit" into the desert.
  - Because 40 appears so often in contexts dealing with judgment or testing, many scholars understand it to be the number of "probation" or "trial."
- Matthew and Luke give far more detail than Mark gives.
  - John does not include the temptation focusing instead on Jesus' divine nature and purpose, mentioning Satan's lack of power over Him and jumping straight to His public ministry after His baptism, suggesting a different theological emphasis.
  - John's narrative skips the temptation, starting with Jesus' public appearance (John 1:29), but refers to the "prince of this world" having no claim over Jesus (John 14:30), indicating an understanding of spiritual conflict without detailing the classic temptation scenes

- *Peirazo*, which means "to test" or "tempt," describes the Satan's attempts to trap Jesus during his 40 days in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1). Jesus uses a different form from the same root (Greek: *ekpeirazo*) when he tells the Satan that you should not "test" God (Matt. 4:7).
  - In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible), this root translates the Hebrew verb *nissah*, which is used both for God testing Israel to reveal what's in their hearts (Exod. 16:4) and for the people testing God by not trusting in his provision (Exod. 17:2).
  - This word draws a connection between Jesus' wilderness experience and Israel's desert wanderings, inviting us to compare and contrast these related stories. But there is a key difference between the kinds of testing that Jesus and Israel experience in the wilderness. While God tests the Israelites to invite them to trust in him, the Satan tries to trap Jesus by tempting him to turn away from the Father. But Jesus passes the tests, demonstrating his faithfulness to the Father.

## Jesus' Temptation

(Matt 4:1-11; Mark 1:9-12, 13; Luke 4:1-13)

- Similarly, the Israelites passed through the waters of the Red Sea before 40 years of testing in the wilderness. But where the Israelites repeatedly failed to trust God to meet their needs, Jesus demonstrates complete trust in his Father, showing that he can fulfill Israel's calling to bring God's blessing to the world.
- I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Gen 12:3)
- You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel." (Ex 19:4-6)



# The Wilderness

## Group Study

### Introduction

In the Bible, the wilderness is a place of both hardship and hope, where divine testing and provision shape humanity's faith. Gather a group and explore the Bible's wilderness theme by reading Scripture passages, collecting insights, and discussing key takeaways. We recommend printing this PDF to share with each participant for reference and note-taking.

Each of the seven 45-minute sessions in this study follows the same basic steps.

- **Step 1: Consider a key question.** This question will be the primary focus of the session, but the goal is not to answer the question immediately. Instead, have it in the back of your mind as your group works through the session. By the end of the session, you will likely feel more equipped to respond to the question.
- **Step 2: Read Scripture together.** These passages will relate to the key question, though you might not see the connections right away. That's okay. Reading ancient literature can be disorienting, but reading together will help your group navigate each week's passages.
- **Step 3: Make space for asking questions.** The point of this study is not to answer your questions right away, or even make clear observations right away. The goal is to give space for curiosity and reflection. Encourage people to record questions so that they can come back to them later.

- **Step 4: Collect insights from the Scripture readings.** These insights come from the BibleProject Scholarship team. They include historical and narrative context, word definitions, observations of literary design, and hyperlink summaries.
- **Step 5: Re-read the Scripture passages.** After engaging with the insights, you'll hopefully see the Scriptures from new perspectives and notice more connections.
- **Step 6: Discuss as a group.** Wrap up with a conversation about the passages and insights, guided by the discussion questions at the end of each session. For those who want to go further, check out the related resources.

**Here are the sessions in this study:**

- Session 1: From the Wilderness to the Garden and Back Again
- Session 2: Exile Encounters With God in the Wilderness
- Session 3: Wilderness Humbling and Grumbling
- Session 4: Singing in the Wilderness
- Session 5: Jesus' Wilderness Tests (or Traps)
- Session 6: Bread in the Wilderness
- Session 7: Faithfulness in the Wilderness Leads to Rest

**Share Your Feedback**

We'd love to hear how you found this resource helpful or how you think it could be improved. Please email us at [info@bibleproject.com](mailto:info@bibleproject.com).

## SESSION 1

# From the Wilderness to the Garden and Back Again

God creates order from chaos, a garden from a wilderness wasteland, and he invites humans to be in that garden space with him. But when humans choose to do what is right in their own eyes, they are exiled from God's good garden and sent back into the wilderness, where life returns to dust.

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### Step 1: Consider Key Question

How do the first chapters of the biblical story introduce the cycle of wilderness to garden and back to wilderness?

### Step 2: Read Scripture

Start by exploring how the first pages of the Bible describe God creating a garden from a wilderness wasteland and humans returning to the wilderness as a result of their choices.

- Genesis 1:1-2
- Genesis 2:4-15
- Genesis 3:22-24

### Step 3: Ask Questions

Make space for everyone to ask questions about the passages you just read. The point is not to answer the questions but to give space for curiosity. To the best of your ability, focus your questions on how these passages connect to the wilderness theme. Write your questions down so you can reference them later.

### Step 4: Collect Insights

Explore some key insights from these passages.

#### Word Definition: *Tohu Vavohu*

The biblical story begins in a watery wasteland. Genesis 1:2 describes the world's initial state with the Hebrew phrase *tohu vavohu*, meaning "wild and waste" (BibleProject Translation).

Although none of the Hebrew words for “wilderness” appear in this passage, biblical authors use the phrase *tohu vavohu* elsewhere to describe a lifeless desert (see Jer. 4:23-26; Deut. 32:10). This language links the formless world at the beginning of the story to the image of a wilderness landscape. God creates order and life from a chaotic wilderness expanse.

### **Story Context**

The cycle of chaos to order—wilderness to garden and back again—is a thread that runs through the whole biblical story. Both Genesis 1 and 2 follow the pattern of God creating order out of chaos. While Genesis 1 begins with a watery wasteland, Genesis 2 starts with a dry and dusty wilderness landscape (Gen. 2:5). Just as God creates life from the watery expanse in Genesis 1, so in Genesis 2 God waters the thirsty ground and plants a lush garden there.

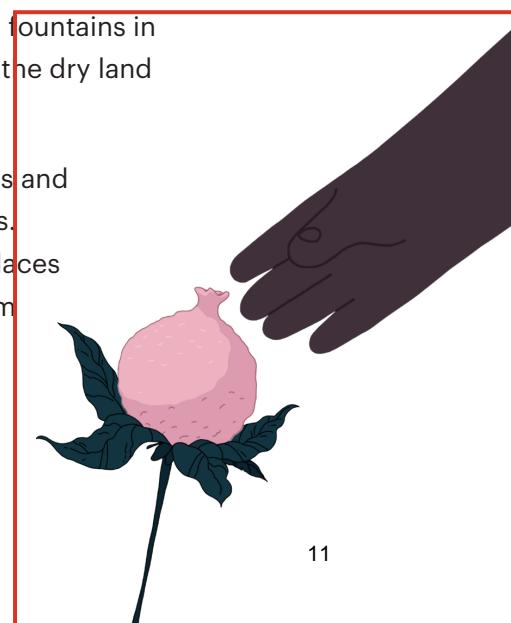
God gives humans the task of cultivating and caring for the garden, but they refuse to live by God’s wisdom. Instead, they choose to define good and bad for themselves (Gen. 3:1-6), reintroducing chaos into God’s good creation. Weeds choke the flourishing landscape (Gen. 3:17-18), and humans are exiled from the garden into the wilderness, where they will eventually return to the same dust from which God created the abundant world (Gen. 3:19, 23-24).

So the cycle begins. God designed humans for life in the garden. But when they reject his instruction, they end up exiled in barren places. Once in the wilderness, humans must make another choice. They can choose to trust God, who’s able to make the desert an oasis of flowing water and abundant food, or they can live by their own wisdom.

### **Hyperlink Summary**

Israel’s prophets draw on the image of water in the wilderness to express God’s restoration of order and abundance in times of scarcity. When Israel is suffering in Babylonian exile, Isaiah 41:17-18 portrays their desperate need as a thirst God promises to quench, saying, “I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water” (Isa. 41:18, NRSV).

Just as water in dry places becomes an expression of God’s care, thorns and thistles are a reminder of humanity’s loss of Eden in later biblical stories. The prophets often use imagery of choking weeds smothering fertile places to communicate the consequences of humanity rejecting God’s wisdom (see Isa. 5:1-7; Hos. 10:8; Isa. 32:12-15).



## Step 5: Re-Read Scripture

- Genesis 1:1-2
- Genesis 2:4-15
- Genesis 3:22-24

## Step 6: Discuss as a Group

- How does what we've learned so far shed light on any of your earlier questions?
- What did you notice as we read these passages? What observations about the wilderness stand out to you?
- What do you think these passages suggest about God or his desires for humanity? As a community, how are we invited to respond?
- Are you seeing connections to other parts of Scripture or life in general?

### Want To Go Further?

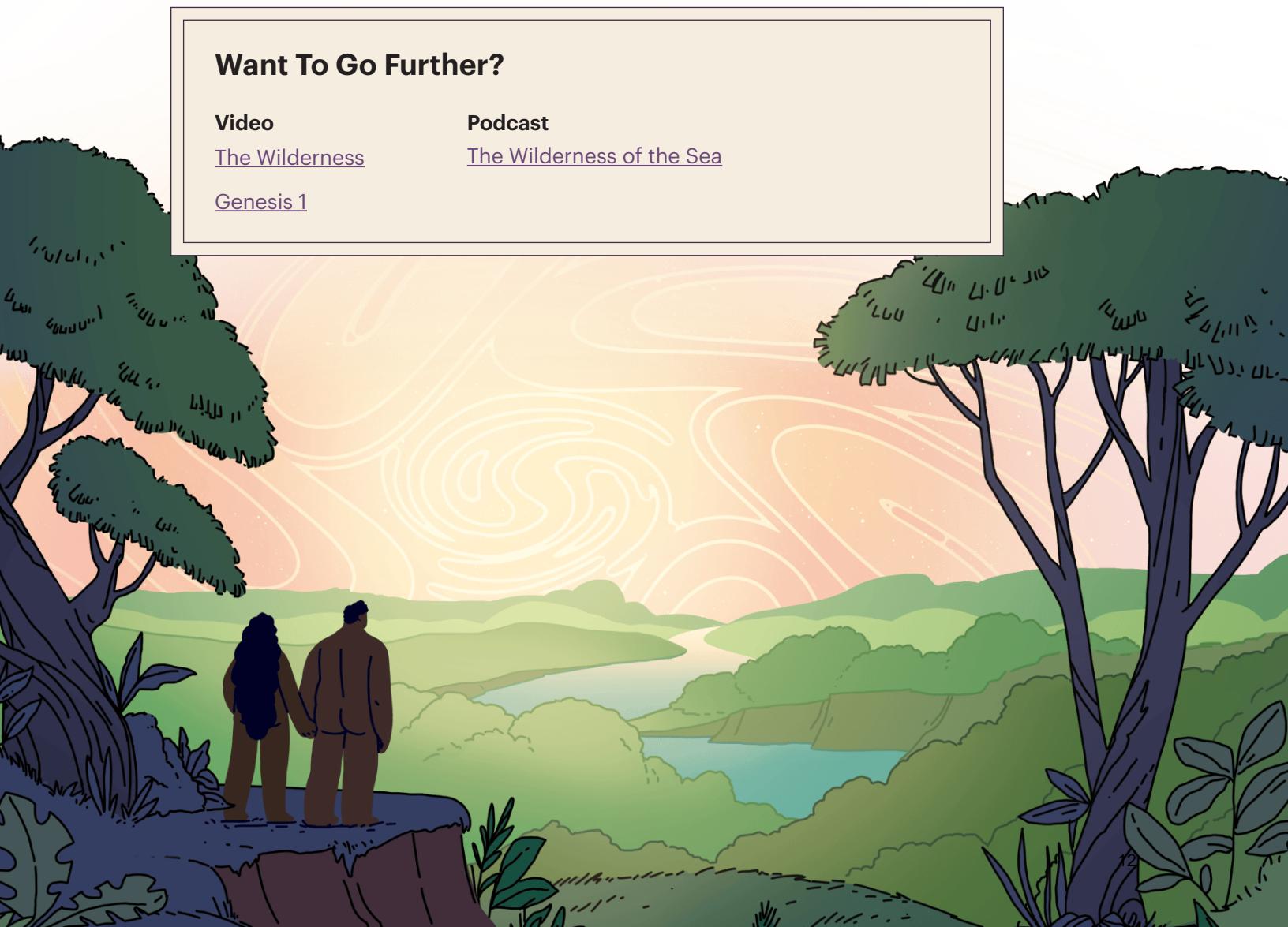
#### Video

[The Wilderness](#)

[Genesis 1](#)

#### Podcast

[The Wilderness of the Sea](#)



## SESSION 2

# Exile Encounters With God in the Wilderness

God can transform the wilderness into a place of refuge, where people encounter him and receive both a new identity and divine provision.

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## Step 1: Consider Key Question

What do the stories of Hagar and Moses reveal about the wilderness as a place where people are seen by God and given a new identity?

## Step 2: Read Scripture

Start by exploring the examples of Hagar and Moses, who both encounter God in the wilderness.

- Genesis 16:1-15
- Exodus 3:1-6

## Step 3: Ask Questions

Make space for everyone to ask questions about the passages you just read. The point is not to answer the questions but to give space for curiosity. To the best of your ability, focus your questions on how these passages connect to the wilderness theme. Write your questions down so you can reference them later.

## Step 4: Collect Insights

Explore some key insights from these passages.

### Story Context

God promises Abram and Sarai (later Abraham and Sarah) a child, but after several years of waiting, Sarai still hasn't conceived. So she takes matters into her own hands, forcing the enslaved Egyptian Hagar to sleep with Abram and bear a child for her. But when Hagar becomes pregnant, Sarai oppresses her. Just like Adam and Eve before them, Abram and Sarai fail to trust God, choosing instead to carry out their own plan on their own terms.

In response to Sarai's mistreatment, Hagar flees into the wilderness. Exiled because of the harmful choices of others, she is alone, vulnerable, and pregnant in a desolate land filled with predators. But God sees and hears Hagar's distress when no one else does. He calls her to return to Abram's household, where she can safely bear her child, and promises to give her an expansive family through her son, Ishmael.

Hagar's identity is recast when God speaks hope and dignity to her in the wilderness. She becomes the only biblical character to give God a name, *El Roi*, which means "the God who sees me" (Gen. 16:13).

Unlike Hagar, Moses ends up in the wilderness because of his own bad decisions. When he witnesses an Egyptian beating a fellow Hebrew, Moses kills the Egyptian and flees to the desert to escape Pharaoh's wrath (Exod. 2:11-15). But God meets Moses on the desolate slopes of Mount Horeb, appearing to him in a burning bush.

Moses' identity is unclear at this point in the story. He's of Hebrew descent, but he was raised in Pharaoh's household and married into a Midianite clan. At the burning bush, God reaffirms Moses' identity as a Hebrew, an heir of his promises to Abraham (Exod. 3:6). And he gives Moses a new purpose, calling him to rescue the Hebrews from Pharaoh's oppressive enslavement (Exod. 3:7-10). Like Hagar, Moses finds a place of refuge and new identity in the wilderness.

### **Word Definition: *Midbar***

Both Hagar and Moses find themselves in the *midbar* (Gen. 16:7; Exod. 3:1), the word most frequently used for "wilderness" in the Hebrew Bible. *Midbar* refers to uncultivated land, which is often hostile and dangerous. Like many characters in the Bible, Hagar and Moses experience the wilderness as a place of exile. But they also encounter God there, and in that desolate wasteland, God breathes new hope and life into them.

### **Hyperlink Summary**

When God speaks to Moses from the burning bush, he promises that one day Israel will worship God on that very mountain (Exod. 3:12). Sure enough, when Moses leads Israel out of slavery in Egypt, they encounter God at Mount Horeb (also called Mount Sinai, Exod. 19:2). And there in the wilderness, God reveals their new identity as his "treasured possession" (Exod. 19:5).



## Step 5: Re-Read Scripture

- Genesis 16:1-15
- Exodus 3:1-6

## Step 6: Discuss as a Group

- How does what we've learned so far shed light on any of your earlier questions?
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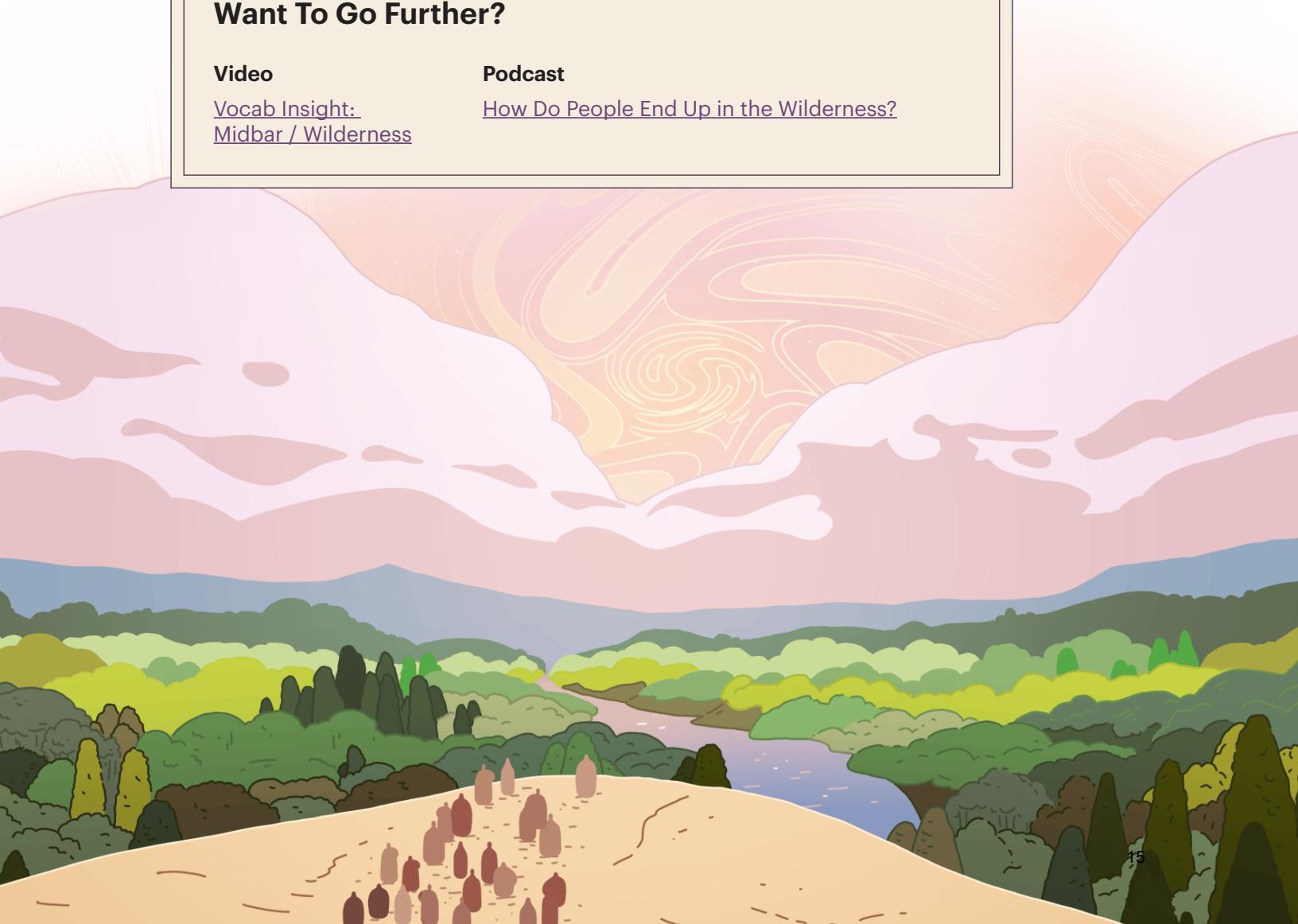
### Want To Go Further?

#### Video

[Vocab Insight:  
Midbar / Wilderness](#)

#### Podcast

[How Do People End Up in the Wilderness?](#)



## SESSION 3

# Wilderness Humbling and Grumbling

The wilderness can become a formative place for God's people, teaching them to trust God for provision and purpose.

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## Step 1: Consider Key Question

How are God's people invited to trust him in the wilderness?

## Step 2: Read Scripture

Start by exploring God's invitation to Israel to trust him in the wilderness.

- Exodus 16:1-20

## Step 3: Ask Questions

Make space for everyone to ask questions about the passage you just read. The point is not to answer the questions but to give space for curiosity. To the best of your ability, focus your questions on how this passage connects to the wilderness theme. Write your questions down so you can reference them later.

## Step 4: Collect Insights

Explore some key insights from this passage.

### Story Context

After suffering for centuries as slaves in Egypt, Israel's freedom in the wilderness might seem like a breath of fresh air. But the desolate landscape introduces its own set of problems. There is no food or water, so the Israelites quickly become desperate with hunger and thirst. They even start wishing they'd died in Egypt (Exod. 16:3)! But the scarcity of the wilderness is an invitation for the people to trust God for their next meal and everything they need to survive.

The Israelites could have reached their new home in a couple of weeks if they had taken a direct route along the Mediterranean coast. But God said the shorter route would expose them to warfare too quickly, causing them to run back to Egypt. So God intentionally took the people the long way to the promised land, leading them through the wilderness to build courage and provide them with ample opportunity to learn to trust him and follow his instructions (Exod. 13:17-18).

Moses reminds the Israelites of this in a speech before he dies, saying that God led them through the wilderness for 40 years to “humble” and “test” them (Deut. 8:2). As they prepare to enter a plentiful land, which might tempt them to forget God’s provision and instruction, he challenges them to remember the lessons they learned in the desert (Deut. 8:3-18).

### **Literary Design**

On their journey from Egypt to Mount Sinai, the Israelites face three tests in the wilderness, arranged in a symmetrical design.

A: Lack of water (Exod. 15:22-27)

B: Lack of food (Exod. 16:1-36)

A': Lack of water (Exod. 17:1-7)

Each of these tests provides the people with an opportunity to trust God. But when they face the harsh limitations of the wilderness, they repeatedly respond by giving in to despair and grumbling against Moses (Exod. 15:24, 16:2-3, 17:2-3). Still, in each case, God abundantly provides for their needs. Amidst the scarcity of the wilderness, God shows his people that they can trust him with their very lives.

In the central story, God responds to the people’s cry for food by sending manna, a strange bread-like substance that appears with the morning dew and sustains Israel all the way to the promised land (see Josh. 5:12). The manna provides another test of the people’s willingness to follow God’s instruction. God tells the people to collect only as much manna as they need to feed their household for one day, except on the sixth day, when they are to gather enough for two days in preparation for the Sabbath (Exod. 16:19, 22-26).

But some of the people don’t listen to these instructions, storing up extra manna only to find that it turns into a mess of maggots the next day (Exod. 16:20).

Others go out to collect manna on the Sabbath and discover that the ground is bare (Exod. 16:27).

Later, after God enters into a covenant relationship with the Israelites (see Exod. 19-24), the pattern continues with seven more wilderness tests (see Num. 11-21). As they journey through the desolate wasteland, God shapes the Israelites so that they are no longer fearful but free and secure in their God-given identity and future.



## Step 5: Re-Read Scripture

- Exodus 16:1-20

## Step 6: Discuss as a Group

- How does what we've learned so far shed light on any of your earlier questions?
- What did you notice as we read this passage? What observations about the wilderness stand out to you?
- What do you think this passage suggests about God or his desires for humanity? As a community, how are we invited to respond?
- Are you seeing connections to other parts of Scripture or life in general?

### Want To Go Further?

#### Video

[The Test](#)

#### Podcast

[Why Does God Lead Israel Into the Wilderness?](#)

[Lessons From the Wilderness for the Garden Land](#)



## SESSION 4

# Singing in the Wilderness

Israel's prophets use the images of wilderness and garden to describe both the bleak consequences of rejecting God and God's ability to bring restoration.

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### Step 1: Consider Key Question

How do Israel's prophets use wilderness and garden imagery?

### Step 2: Read Scripture

Start by exploring the description of Israel's coming exile as a garden turning into a desolate wilderness and God's promise to bring restoration in the wilderness.

- Jeremiah 4:23-26
- Hosea 2:14-20
- Isaiah 5:13

### Step 3: Ask Questions

Make space for everyone to ask questions about the passages you just read. The point is not to answer the questions but to give space for curiosity. To the best of your ability, focus your questions on how these passages connect to the wilderness theme. Write your questions down so you can reference them later.

### Step 4: Collect Insights

Explore some key insights from these passages.

#### Story Context

As we noted in the last session, just before the Israelites entered the promised land, Moses cautioned them not to forget God's provision in the wilderness when they grew comfortable and well fed (Deut. 8:1-18). Despite his warning, the people quickly turn away from God when no longer faced with the scarcity of the wilderness. Worse yet, the Israelites use their newfound power and security to oppress those in need.

God confronts his people through the prophets, warning that their garden-like home will turn into a dry wilderness if they continue to reject God's instruction. But the people do not listen to the prophets' warnings. So the cycle introduced in the first chapters of the Bible repeats, as the people are exiled from their land.

Yet the story doesn't end there. God promises, through the prophets, to bring Israel out into the wilderness in order to woo them back into a marriage-like relationship, leading them to trust in him once again. And though their enemies have laid their land waste, God promises to restore it to its Eden-like state once more.

### **Hyperlink Summary**

When the prophet Jeremiah describes the consequences of Israel's choices, he uses language from the story of creation. In the first verses of the Bible, God creates the world from a watery expanse that is "wild and waste" (*tohu vavohu*, Gen. 1:2, BibleProject Translation). So in an act of reversal, Jeremiah says that God will turn Israel's Eden-like home back into a wilderness that is *tohu vavohu* (Jer. 4:23). Their destructive choices lead to de-creation, as the order of God's good garden dissolves into wilderness chaos once more.

But the prophet Hosea offers a positive reversal, promising that the Valley of Achor, which means "trouble," will become "a door of hope" (Hos. 2:15). The Valley of Achor was the setting for a terrible moment in Israel's history when a man named Achan disobeyed God's instruction and the whole Israelite community paid the price (Josh. 7). Achan and his family were buried in that valley, so it carries the memory of rebellion and tragedy. Now God declares that even the most dismal places will be filled with possibility and hope when he restores his people.



## Step 5: Re-Read Scripture

- Jeremiah 4:23-26
- Hosea 2:14-20
- Isaiah 5:13

## Step 6: Discuss as a Group

- How does what we've learned so far shed light on any of your earlier questions?
- What did you notice as we read these passages? What observations about the wilderness stand out to you?
- What do you think these passages suggest about God or his desires for humanity? As a community, how are we invited to respond?
- Are you seeing connections to other parts of Scripture or life in general?

### Want To Go Further?

#### Podcast

[The Wilderness Remixed in Israel's Prophets](#)

## SESSION 5

# **Jesus' Wilderness Tests (or Traps)**

When Jesus faces wilderness tests, he demonstrates trust in the Father's provision and care.

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### **Step 1: Consider Key Question**

How does Jesus' experience in the wilderness recall Israel's 40 years of wandering in the desert?

### **Step 2: Read Scripture**

Start by exploring Jesus' wilderness tests.

- Matthew 4:1-11

### **Step 3: Ask Questions**

Make space for everyone to ask questions about the passage you just read. The point is not to answer the questions but to give space for curiosity. To the best of your ability, focus your questions on how this passage connects to the wilderness theme. Write your questions down so you can reference them later.

### **Step 4: Collect Insights**

Explore some key insights from this passage.

#### **Hyperlink Summary**

After being baptized in the Jordan River, Jesus enters the wilderness, where he experiences 40 days of testing. Similarly, the Israelites passed through the waters of the Red Sea before 40 years of testing in the wilderness. But where the Israelites repeatedly failed to trust God to meet their needs, Jesus demonstrates complete trust in his Father, showing that he can fulfill Israel's calling to bring God's blessing to the world (see Gen. 12:3; Exod. 19:4-6).

In the wildlands, Jesus meets a deceiver called “the devil” (Greek: *diabolos*, also called “the Satan” or “adversary”), who tries to trap Jesus with clever words. After Jesus fasts for 40 days, the Satan tempts him to turn stones into bread. Rather than grumbling like Israel or taking matters into his own hands, Jesus chooses to rely on the Father to provide for his needs. He responds by quoting Moses’ words that humans “shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4, NIV; see Deut. 8:3).

Next, the Satan twists God’s promise in Psalm 91:11-12, challenging Jesus to jump from a high place and see if God will save him. But Jesus again quotes Moses’ words: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test” (Matt. 4:7, NIV; see Deut. 6:16).

Finally, the Satan offers Jesus a powerful position if Jesus will bow down and worship him. But Jesus quotes Moses a third time: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only” (Matt. 4:10, NIV; see Deut. 6:13, 10:20). Unlike the Israelites in the wilderness, Jesus follows God’s instructions given through Moses.

### **Word Definition: Peirazo**

The Greek word *peirazo*, which means “to test” or “tempt,” describes the Satan’s attempts to trap Jesus during his 40 days in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1). Jesus uses a different form from the same root (Greek: *ekpeirazo*) when he tells the Satan that you should not “test” God (Matt. 4:7).

In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible), this root translates the Hebrew verb *nissah*, which is used both for God testing Israel to reveal what’s in their hearts (Exod. 16:4) and for the people testing God by not trusting in his provision (Exod. 17:2).

This word draws a connection between Jesus’ wilderness experience and Israel’s desert wanderings, inviting us to compare and contrast these related stories. But there is a key difference between the kinds of testing that Jesus and Israel experience in the wilderness. While God tests the Israelites to invite them to trust in him, the Satan tries to trap Jesus by tempting him to turn away from the Father. But Jesus passes the tests, demonstrating his faithfulness to the Father.



## Step 5: Re-Read Scripture

- Matthew 4:1-11

## Step 6: Discuss as a Group

- How does what we've learned so far shed light on any of your earlier questions?
- What did you notice as we read this passage? What observations about the wilderness stand out to you?
- What do you think this passage suggests about God or his desires for humanity? As a community, how are we invited to respond?
- Are you seeing connections to other parts of Scripture or life in general?

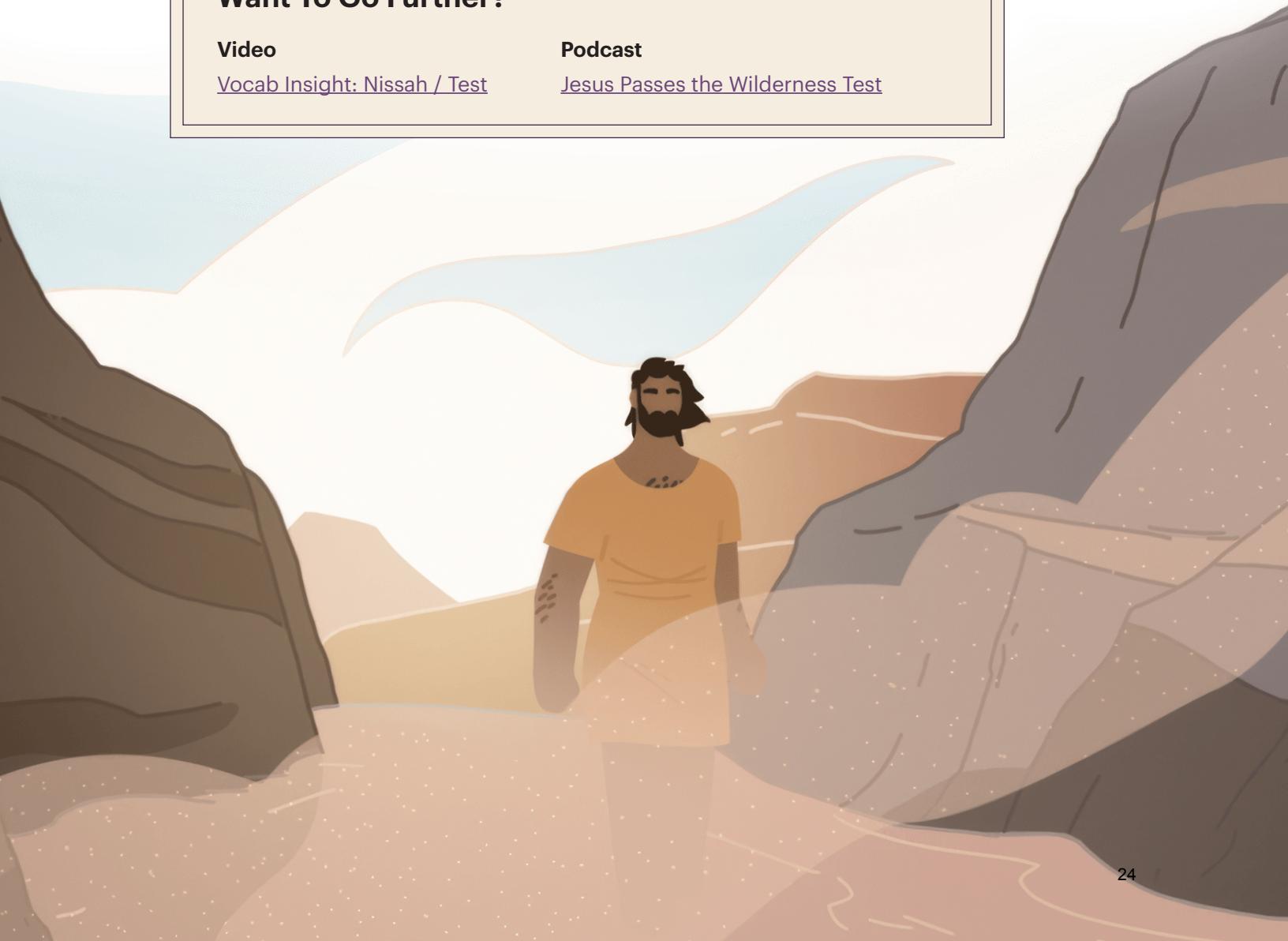
### Want To Go Further?

#### Video

[Vocab Insight: Nissah / Test](#)

#### Podcast

[Jesus Passes the Wilderness Test](#)



## SESSION 6

# Bread in the Wilderness

When faced with the scarcity of the wilderness, Jesus looks to the Father and trusts that he can generously provide for a hungry multitude.

---

### Step 1: Consider Key Question

How does the wilderness feast provided in this story echo God's provision for Israel in the desert?

### Step 2: Read Scripture

Start by exploring Jesus' responses and actions in the wilderness.

- Mark 6:34-44
- John 6:30-31, 35, 41-42, 48-51

### Step 3: Ask Questions

Make space for everyone to ask questions about the passages you just read. The point is not to answer the questions but to give space for curiosity. To the best of your ability, focus your questions on how these passages connect to the wilderness theme. Write your questions down so you can reference them later.

### Step 4: Collect Insights

Explore some key insights from these passages.

#### Story Context

When the disciples tell Jesus to send the crowd away to buy food, they're likely hoping for some rest and nourishment for themselves as well. They already tried retreating to a quiet place with Jesus, but the crowd followed them (Mark 6:31-33).

Instead of agreeing to the disciples' request, Jesus asks them to feed the crowd. Overwhelmed by the prospect of finding food for so many people in a deserted place, the disciples fail to recognize that Jesus is inviting them to trust God with the needs of the 5,000 men (plus women and children) gathered around them in the wilderness.

When they bring Jesus their meager supply of five loaves and two fish, he confidently looks to the Father to multiply it into enough food to satisfy everyone. And after everyone has eaten their fill, the disciples collect 12 baskets of leftovers, recalling God's abundant provision for the 12 tribes of Israel in the wilderness.

### **Hyperlink Summary**

John's gospel reveals that even after Jesus' astonishing multiplication of bread (see John 6:1-14), the crowds continue to doubt, demanding another sign from Jesus, like the manna God provided for their ancestors (see Exod. 16). Jesus responds by saying, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35, 48). In other words, he is the true nourishment they're longing for. The manna God gave the Israelites in the wilderness sustained their bodies for a season, but those who are nourished by Jesus will live forever.

By multiplying bread in a desolate wasteland, Jesus reveals that he can abundantly provide for people's physical needs, while also pointing to the more profound truth that he is the source of true life for those willing to follow him. But the people "grumble" or "complain" at Jesus' words (John 6:41), just as the Israelites "grumbled" or "complained" in the wilderness (Exod. 16:2).



## Step 5: Re-Read Scripture

- Mark 6:34-44
- John 6:30-31, 35, 41-42, 48-51

## Step 6: Discuss as a Group

- How does what we've learned so far shed light on any of your earlier questions?
- What did you notice as we read these passages? What observations about the wilderness stand out to you?
- What do you think these passages suggest about God or his desires for humanity? As a community, how are we invited to respond?
- Are you seeing connections to other parts of Scripture or life in general?

### Want To Go Further?

#### Podcast

[Jesus, the New Shepherd in the Wilderness](#)

## SESSION 7

# Faithfulness in the Wilderness Leads to Rest

True rest is available for those who learn to trust God enough to follow his instruction and embrace his way of life.

---

## Step 1: Consider Key Question

How does the author of Hebrews invite us to learn from Israel's time in the wilderness?

## Step 2: Read Scripture

Start by exploring the challenge to trust God as we look forward to the rest he has promised.

- Hebrews 3:12-4:11

## Step 3: Ask Questions

Make space for everyone to ask questions about the passage you just read. The point is not to answer the questions but to give space for curiosity. To the best of your ability, focus your questions on how this passage connects to the wilderness theme. Write your questions down so you can reference them later.

## Step 4: Collect Insights

Explore some key insights from this passage.

### Word Definitions: Meribah and Massah

The line quoted in Hebrews 4:7 refers to Psalm 95:8: "Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness" (NIV).

This verse alludes to a story found in Exodus 17:1-7 when the Israelites had no water in the wilderness. The place-name Meribah comes from the Hebrew root *riv*, which means "quarrel," and Massah comes from *nissah*, which means "test." Moses gave the place these names because the people quarreled against him and tested God. Still, despite their lack of trust, God mercifully provided water from a rock.

The author of Hebrews points back to this moment in Israel's story as a reminder to turn to God with soft and receptive hearts.

## Story Context

God rescued the Israelites from brutal slavery in Egypt in order to bring them to a place of rest in the promised land. But when they got to the edge of the land, they were afraid of the people in it and refused to enter. Instead of learning to trust God through their wilderness hardships, they had become calloused and hard-hearted. So the original Israelite generation that escaped Egypt, including Moses, wandered in the wilderness until they died, never entering God's rest in the land of promise (Num. 13-14).

The next generation of Israelites followed Joshua into the promised land and experienced rest from their enemies for a time (Josh. 21:44). But this was not the fullness of rest that God established on the seventh day of creation (Gen. 2:2-3). And when the people rejected God's instruction and oppressed the vulnerable, they corrupted even this incomplete rest.

Through his death and resurrection, Jesus opens up the way to the deep Sabbath rest that began when God created the world and will reach its fullness in the new creation. Jesus is a new Joshua (both names are *Iesous* in Greek), who leads people into God's ultimate Sabbath rest by teaching them to trust God for protection and provision.

The author of Hebrews challenges people to hold on to this hope, even when they're afraid or facing scarcity like Israel did in the wilderness, so they can turn to God and experience true rest.



## Step 5: Re-Read Scripture

- Hebrews 3:12-4:11

## Step 6: Discuss as a Group

- How does what we've learned so far shed light on any of your earlier questions?
- What did you notice as we read this passage? What observations about the wilderness stand out to you?
- What do you think this passage suggests about God or his desires for humanity? As a community, how are we invited to respond?
- Are you seeing connections to other parts of Scripture or life in general?

### Want To Go Further?

#### Video

[Sabbath](#)

#### Podcast

[Living in the Wilderness Now](#)

[Hebrews: The Quest for Final Rest](#)



## Jesus' Temptation

(Matt 4:1-11; Mark 1:9-12, 13; Luke 4:1-13)

- **3 specific temptations of significance:**

- To turn stones into bread to relieve His hunger
- To cast Himself down from the heights of the temple to prove that God would persevere Him (twisting of the words of Psalm 91:11-12)
- And to seek control of the kingdoms of the world but compromising His commitment through worship of Satan
- Jesus recognized that they were designed to divert him away from accomplishing God's will in God's way by substituting an alien plan.
- Jesus continually found comfort, guidance, and strength through the Scripture .
  - Consider the work of the enemy in the Garden..."did God really say?"

## Jesus' Temptation

(Matt 4:1-11; Mark 1:9-12, 13; Luke 4:1-13)

- Notice that Jesus responds to each test by quoting from the Torah, specifically from the book of Deuteronomy (8:3, 6:16, and 6:13). These are precisely the sections of Deuteronomy that retell the story of Israel's failure in the wilderness.
  - "And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word, that comes from the mouth of the Lord." (Deut 8:3)
  - "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah." (Deut 6:16)
  - "It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear." (Deut 6:13)

# REFLECTION

- “For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” (Hebrews 2:18)
- “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15)
- **After you have watched the included videos that really connect the temptation to the full narrative of Scripture, reflect on:**
  - The serpent twists God’s Word. Satan quotes Scripture. Jesus answers with Scripture. What does this teach you about the importance of knowing God’s Word well, not just hearing it?
  - In Genesis 3, the serpent begins with, “Did God really say...?” Where do you hear similar questions in your own moments of temptation? How does the enemy tend to distort God’s Word rather than deny it outright?

## Wedding at Cana

- **What is the difference between a sign, wonder, or miracle?**
- **Signs:** miraculous works of God that point to who He is and what He is doing in the world
- **Wonder:** similar to signs but have a different emphasis. A sign might appeal to the understand while a wonder appeals to the imagination. Sign emphasizes that the miracle proves and wonder emphasizes how the miracle inspires worship.
- **Miracle:** are seen when God directly and supernaturally intervenes in a way that seems to go against the natural order

# Wedding at Cana

- **Why does God perform miracles?**
  - To authenticate His Messenger
  - As Part of His Message
  - To serve as a foreshadow
- **The word in Greek for miracle or sign is “semeion.”** (The word for wonder us usually “Teras”)
  - The choice for translation often depends on context but *semeion* is the word used here in the Gospel of John
  - **Semeia** occurs 77 times in the NT and can mean a sign or mark where something is shown or it can mean an event that is an indication of intervention by transcendent powers like a miracle. In reality, *semeia* can be translated as either miracle or sign. But we tend to use, but not always, miracles when the event appears to violate the natural order.

# Wedding at Cana

- **Miracle:** A miracle is “an observable phenomenon effected by the direct operation of God's power, an arresting deviation from the ordinary sequence of nature, a deviation calculated to beget faith-begetting awe, a divine in-breaking which authenticates a revelational agent. In other words, a miracle is an act performed by God that is an indisputable change in natural law that validates one of His revelatory messengers.
- The Greek under *miracles* is *dunamis* which is favored by the Synoptic writers
- The miracles of the New Testament authenticated Jesus as the Messiah and the Apostles as His spokesmen.

# Wedding at Cana

- Individuals certainly benefited from the healing miracles of Jesus, but these acts were always done to authenticate Who He was and to affirm His divine mission to atone for sins. Jesus certainly had compassion on the sick, but their physical comfort took a distant back seat to his concern for their spiritual well-being. He knew their greatest need was not healing from sickness and disease but from sin.
- “All Old Testament signs served to authenticate God’s appointed divine messengers so that people would believe the message they brought” (The Seven Signs, Selvaggio)
  - In the Gospel of John, they were intended to prove that Jesus was who he said he was, and to help people to believe the message.

# Wedding at Cana

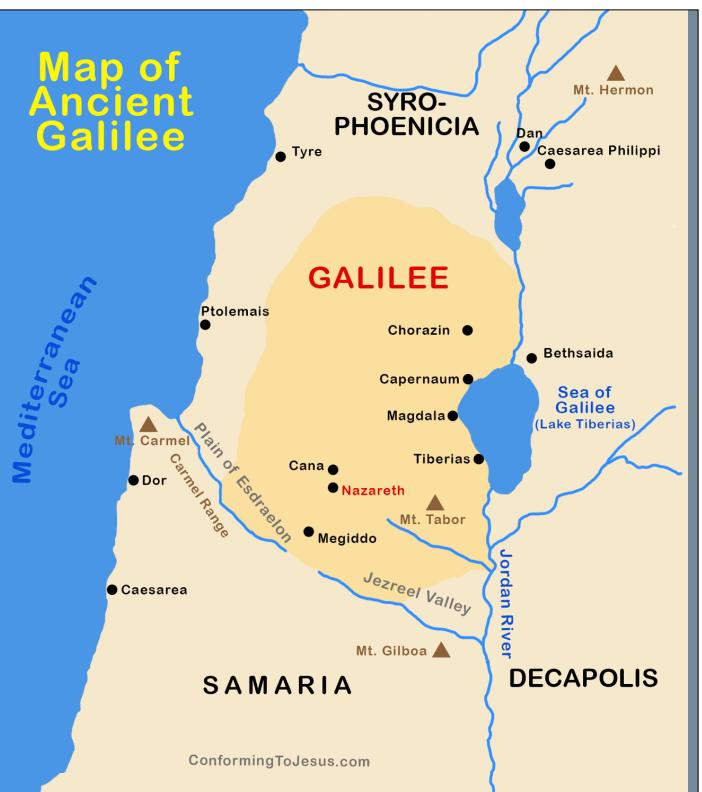
- **Signs in John**

- Signs can be miraculous, but that they do not have to be.
- The greater importance is the role they play in confirming God's message.
  - Hebrews 2:4 “while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.”
- In order for an event to qualify as a sign (*semeia*), the event had to be done in public and that in John's gospel the event had to be explicitly designated by John as a sign (*semeia*).
- Moreover, these signs were selected by John from a pool of other. “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30).”
- So these signs together have a “common, cumulative, and collective purpose” to elicit faith in all who hear of them (7).
  - John uses “sign” because the miracles point beyond themselves to a deeper reality- the unveiling of God's work in Jesus. Those who see it “believed in Him” - key focus in the Gospel of John

# The 7 Signs in the Gospel of John

- Water into Wine: At the wedding in Cana (John 2)
- Healing the Official's Son: From a distance (John 4).
- Healing the Paralytic: At the Pool of Bethesda (John 5).
- Feeding the Five Thousand: With five loaves and two fish (John 6).
- Walking on Water: Calming the sea (John 6).
- Healing the Man Born Blind: (John 9).
- Raising Lazarus: From the dead (John 11).

- “On the 3rd day” continues the progression we saw when John the Baptist was challenged by questioners (John 1:19-28), the next day (1:29) where John bore witness to Jesus as the Lamb of God, then the following day (1:35), several of John’s apostles followed Jesus. This might represent the events of the week where on the 3rd day, Jesus begins His public ministry. In this case, the third day would refer to two days after the events of 1:43-51 which makes sense because it involves a trip from Judea up to Cana of Galilee.
- After the miracle, Jesus “goes down” to Capernaum



# Wedding at Cana

- Some commentaries suggest that by this time Joseph had died and Jesus had taken over the business.
- There is no evidence that Jesus had performed miracles before so it is not clear what Mary was expecting him to do.
- In this culture, the groom was responsible for the wedding expenses and would have faced disgrace for a long time if the wine ran out. He could even have been sued by the bride's family.
- Jesus' reaction might seem startling or rude. But He is longer just her son - it is now time for Him to follow the path His Father had prepared for Him.

# Wedding at Cana

- His expression is "What is it to you and me?" - in the Synoptic Gospels this phrase is used by demons when Jesus is about to cast them out.
- There might be a slight rebuke as in "it's not our problem." Essentially, it seems like Jesus wants to stay out of the drama for "my time has not come."
- In John, there is a theme of time or His hour which always refers to the time of His destiny, the passion events
- Jesus may be saying that He is reluctant to begin the series of events which will culminate in the passion

# Wedding at Cana

- **Possible symbolism**

- Jesus sees the wine as symbolizing the Messianic age and was saying that the hour of his glorification had not come
- Jesus was very oriented to His Father's will rather than that of human schedules and he wanted to be sure the time was right
- As the messianic bridegroom he would meet the need, but the true hour of the messianic banquet had not yet arrived
- Obviously Mary would not have understood this. She simply trusts her son.

# Wedding at Cana

- Jesus uses six stone water jars that would have been used for washing of hands (Mark 7:1-5) or utensils. Their purpose was to render the unclean ritually pure.
- When Jesus filled them with water and turned it into wine, it really is a double miracle. First the unclean jars are made clean and secondly, turned into wine and it was even considered the best wine of the evening.
- There is beautiful symbolism here. In the coming of the final Kingdom there will be an abundance of wine (Is 25:6, Jer 31:12, Hos 14:7) and this banquet is often depicted as a messianic wedding feast (Hos 2:16-23).
- The message is that the messianic age has begun. The “glory of the Father's one and only Son” is now unveiled for all to see

# The First Cleansing of the Temple

- A major textual issue is presented. John places the cleansing of the Temple at the beginning of Jesus' ministry while the Synoptics place it at the end (Mark 11:15-17).
  - Some scholars think there was only one cleansing at the end of his ministry and John got it out of order. That is possible, John doesn't always have a strict chronology.
  - But there is no attempt to arrest or kill Jesus which suggests that this is a separate account. In the Synoptics, the emphasis is upon the cleansing as an act of judgement for the apostasy of the nation. In John, it is messianic zeal. Some scholars even include it in their list of the signs in the Gospel of John.

# The First Cleansing of the Temple

- **There are two parts in this section:**
  - The cleansing of the Temple (2:13-17)
  - The following debate with the Jewish leaders (2:18-22)
- This is the 1st of 3 passover festivals which frame Jesus' ministry in John (see 6:4, 11:55) which breaks Jesus' ministry into a roughly 2 year period
- These records are found only in John but make perfect sense. Jesus would have gone with his parents to Jerusalem for Passover, he would likely have continued as an adult.

# The First Cleansing of the Temple

- There is an emphasize on Jesus' authority as Son of God in ridding "his Father's house" of all impurity
- All of the Gospel accounts focus not on Jesus' use of force but his moral and spiritual outrage.
  - Psalm 69:9 "Passion for your house has consumed me" - one of the most frequent psalms quoted in Jesus' passion.
  - Like David had experienced opposition because he had zeal for his father's house, Jesus as "David's greater Son" would have opposition and in the end the end of the passion He will be consumed by death. John is preparing the reader!
- The temple is no longer the place of God's dwelling because Jesus has become "the new and true dwelling place of God"- the glory which has taken up new residence

# The First Cleansing of the Temple

- **The aftermath:** the leaders demanded that he give them a miraculous sign that he had authority to do this in God's eyes but they don't seem to question the legality of His actions and make no attempt to arrest him.
  - This is actually not as negative as we might assume - they seem to accept the rightness of his action but question the authority
  - The Messiah was understood to give "signs" of his presence - but they would not accept that Jesus had already done and said as proof
- "Destroy this temple and in three days, I will raise it up."

# The First Cleansing of the Temple

- **“Destroy this temple and in three days, I will raise it up.”**
  - This is Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of his bodily temple and his resurrection after 3 days - everything Jesus says and does points to the cross.
  - This is at the heart of John's theology - the world has rejected the revelation of God in Jesus but God loves the world more than it hates him and he has sent this one and only Son to be a sacrifice for sin
  - This first passover anticipates the last passover where Jesus' temple will be destroyed by raised up 3 days later

## Samaritan Woman

- After Jesus had heard that the Pharisees had heard that He had become more popular than John, John 4 tells us that Jesus leaves Judea and moves back to Galilee. The Synoptic Gospels add the detail that John the Baptist had been arrested. Matthew and Mark suggest that is part of His decision to leave Judea, Luke adds that Jesus “returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.”
- Then, after this encounter, he will continue on his way to Galilee where he was welcomed

# Samaritan Woman

- In John, there are 3 salvation dramas:
  - 1:35-51
  - 3: 1-15
  - 4:1-42
- Jesus' discourse here contains the first major discussion on mission (4:31-38)



# Samaritan Woman

- On the way to Galilee, Jesus stops in Samaria because the Father led him to do so. There was no requirement that Jesus go through Samaria to reach Galilee.
- He comes to the village of Sychar near Jacob's well. "The field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph" is mentioned in Genesis 48:22. The Hebrews brought Joseph's bones and buried them there after conquering Canaan.
- Jesus arrives at the hottest time of the day and sits beside the well to rest.
  - Some other notable moments at the well: Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 24), Jacob and Rachel (Genesis 29), Moses and Zipporah (Exodus 2:15-21)

# Samaritan Woman

- **Well meeting pattern:**

- **Journey:** Someone journeys to a foreign country
- **Woman at the well:** The man encounters a woman at a well
- **Draws water:** Someone draws water from the well
- **News:** The woman hurries home to bring news of the visitor
- **Hospitality:** The visitor stays with the woman's family and there is mention of a meal
- **Joining:** The two parties are joined as one

# Samaritan Woman

- **Well meeting pattern:**

- **Journey:** Jesus journeys toward Galilee but travels through Samaria
- **Woman at the well:** He encounters a Samaritan woman at a well. The author says that it was "Jacob's well" (v. 6), further linking this story with the meeting of Jacob and Rachel.
- **Draws water:** The woman comes to "draw water," following the typical well-meeting pattern.
- **HERE'S THE TWIST:** Jesus says that he came to offer her "living water" instead of well water. Jesus' offer of living water is an allusion to the Eden paradigm, where water flowed from the middle of the garden to sustain the whole earth ([Genesis 2:10-14](#)). So Jesus is offering life in connection with himself. But as we've seen, the story has begun in the typical pattern of a marriage story. What is the significance of that? And does it continue to follow the pattern?

# Water of Life

## VIDEO NOTES

Various forms of water play a significant role throughout the entire Bible. Why? The biblical authors portray God's Life as water which is now available through Jesus and the Spirit of God. This is what our theme video, Water of Life, is all about.

These notes go a level deeper than we can cover in a five-minute video. In the following pages, you'll be introduced to key concepts, passages, and images that will enable you to gain a better understanding of the water of life theme throughout the Bible.

# Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Hovering Over the Face of the Waters</b>                               | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>Separating the Dry Land</b>  | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>Visualizations of the Biblical Cosmos</b>                              | <b>5</b>  |
| Egyptian Conceptions  | 6         |
| <b>The Rivers of Eden</b>   | <b>7</b>  |
| Pishon [Genesis 2:11-12]  | 7         |
| Gihon [Genesis 2:13]  | 8         |
| Hidequel and Euphrates [Genesis 2:14]                                     | 8         |
| <b>Eden as a Cosmic Mountain</b>  | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>Separated from the Waters of Life</b>                                  | <b>10</b> |
| <b>The Water of Life in the Gospel of John</b>                            | <b>11</b> |
| Jesus is the Tabernacle [John 1:1-3,14]                                   | 11        |
| Jesus Offers Living Water to the Woman at the Well [4:7-15]               | 12        |
| Jesus offers the water of life at the feast of tabernacles [John 7:37-38] | 15        |
| Jesus Dies as the New Temple [John 19:34-35]                              | 20        |
| <b>Revelation 21-22</b>   | <b>21</b> |
| <b>Sources</b>  | <b>22</b> |

## Hovering Over the Face of the Waters

In the opening scene of the Bible, creation is depicted as a subduing of chaotic waters by means of God's Spirit. The waters on their own are tehom (chaos, disorder), but under the influence of God's Spirit they become the potential for life and abundance. Let's take a look at Genesis 1:2.

2a and the land was **wild** [tohu / תֹהוּ] and waste  
2b and darkness was **on the face of the deep abyss** [tehom]  
2c and the wind/spirit of God was hovering **on the face of the waters** [hamayim]

GENESIS 1:2

These three lines work in parallelism, matching the key terms in order to contrast them.

- In the place of "darkness" is its opposite "spirit of God" which, through the spoken word of God, will bring about "light"
- The double "on the face of the" (-עַל פְנֵי הַ) highlights the two parallel terms for waters, which refer to the same reality (ocean waters) but with two different interpretations:
- 2b: When darkness is present, the waters are threatening and destructive;
- 2c when God's spirit is present, the waters are controlled and can be life-giving.

*"Water is commonly conceived [in the Bible and ANE literature] as a symbol of the oppositional forces of life, an ambiguous symbol of life and death... Water is symbolic of death when it is uncontrolled (too much or too little), and of life, when it is controlled, because it provides growth and fertility. This summarizes the movement from Genesis 1:2 to 2:10-14, from the chaotic waters of the dark abyss to the fructifying rivers of Eden. In the Hebrew Bible, this decisive control of the waters is the prerogative of God who is sovereign over death and life... In this sense, "deep abyss" signifies the negative or threatening aspect of the waters, while "the waters" represent the positive aspect of water under control."*

MICHAEL MORALES, TABERNACLE PREFIGURED: COSMIC MOUNTAIN  
IDEOLOGY IN GENESIS AND EXODUS, 54-55.

## Separating the Dry Land

Let's jump to day 3 of creation, where the dry land appears:

Then God said, "Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let **the dry ground** appear"; and it was so.

God called **the dry ground "land"**, and the gathering of the waters He called "seas;" and God saw that it was good.

GENESIS 1:9-10

The picture we are to imagine involves the waters receding from a mound of dry land and gathering into waters that surround it. This picture is assumed in the following biblical phrases:

| PHRASE   | SCRIPTURES  |
|--|---|
| "the ends/edges of the land"                                     | <p>"The heavens declare the glory of God,<br/>and the dome declares the work of his hands...<br/>Their line has gone out through all the land<br/>And their utterance to <b>the edge of the world...</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;">PSALM 19:1-4</p>   |
|  | <p>'Now these were the visions in my mind as I lay on my bed: I was looking, and behold, there was a tree in the midst of the land and its height was great. <sup>11</sup>'The tree grew large and became strong, and its <b>height reached to the sky</b>, and it was <b>visible to the end of all the land</b>.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">DANIEL 4:10-11</p>  |
|  | <p>Other references: Isaiah 26:15; 41:9; Jeremiah 16:19; Psalms 19:4; 48:10; 65:5; 67:7; Job 28:24; 37:3; 38:13; Daniel 4:11; Acts 13:47</p>  |
| "the four corners of the land/<br>the four winds of the heavens" | <p>And He will lift up a standard for the nations And assemble the banished ones of Israel, And will gather the dispersed of Judah From <b>the four corners of the earth</b>.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">ISAIAH 11:12</p>  |
|  | <p>Other references: Ezekiel 7:2; Zechariah 2:6; 6:5; Rev 7:1</p>   |
| "Land upon the seas/waters"                                      | <p>The <b>land</b> is the Lord's, and all it contains, The <b>world</b>, and those who dwell in it.<br/>For <b>He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the rivers.</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;">PSALM 24:1-2</p> <p>[Give thanks] to Him who made the heavens with skill, For His lovingkindness is everlasting;<br/>To <b>Him who spread out the land above the waters</b>, For His lovingkindness is everlasting</p> <p style="text-align: right;">PSALM 136:5 – 6</p> <p>"You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the land beneath <b>or in the water under the earth</b>.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">EXODUS 20:4</p> |

**He established the land upon its foundations.** So that it will not totter forever and ever.

PSALM 104:5

"When I select an appointed time, It is I who judge with equity.

"The **land** and all who dwell in it melt; It is **I who have firmly set its pillars.** Selah.

PSALM 75:2-3

The "pillars" that uphold the land over the waters

"He raises the poor from the dust, He lifts the needy from the ash heap To make them sit with nobles, And inherit a seat of honor; for **the pillars of the land are the Lord's, And He set the world on them.**

1 SAMUEL 2:8

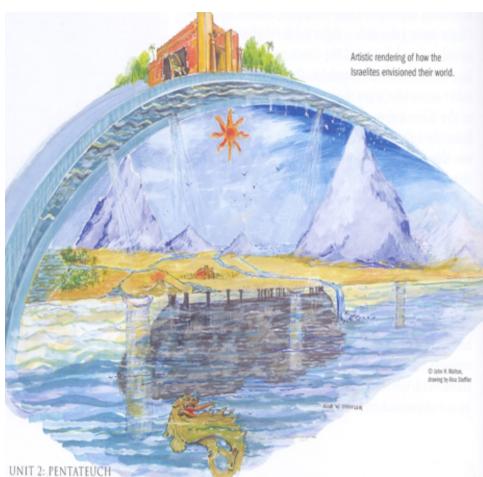
<sup>4</sup> "Where were you **when I laid the foundation of the land?** Tell Me, if you have understanding, Who set its measurements? Since you know. Or who stretched the line on it? **"On what were its bases sunk?** Or who laid its cornerstone, When the morning stars sang together And all the sons of God shouted for joy?

JOB 38:4-7

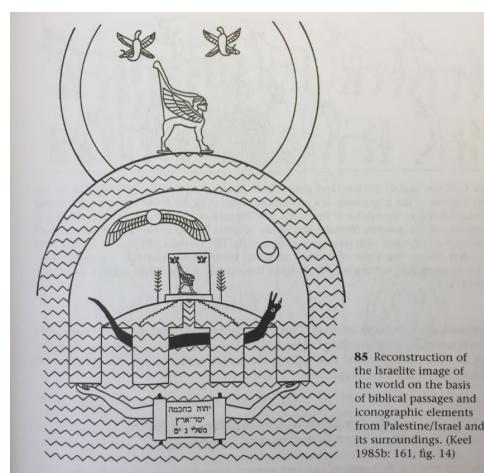
Other references: 2 Samuel 22:16; Psalm 75:3; 104:5; Job 9:6; 38:4; Zechariah 12:1

## Visualizations of the Biblical Cosmos

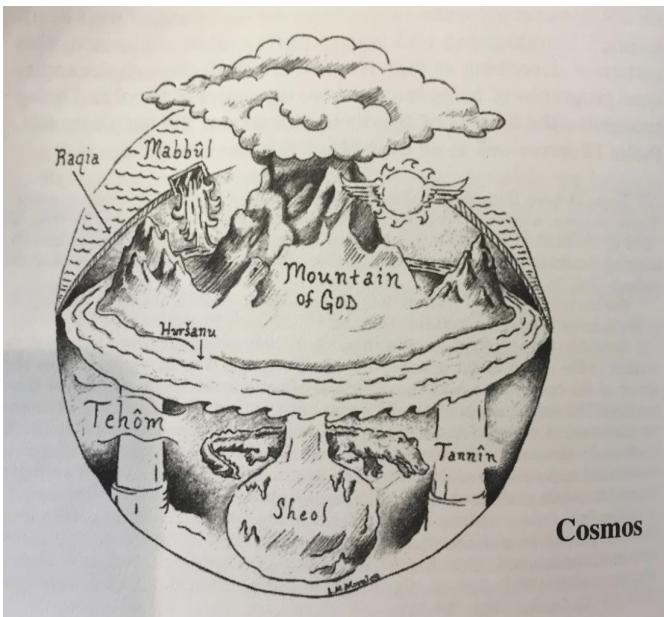
You can probably already tell the ancient understanding of the cosmos is different than our modern conception. Let's look at a couple images to enable us to grasp their visualization of the Biblical Cosmos.



From John Walton, *The Old Testament Today*



From Othmar Keel, *Creation: Biblical Theologies in the Context of the Ancient Near East*



From Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*

“Mabbul” = waters above the dome

“Raqia” = the dome

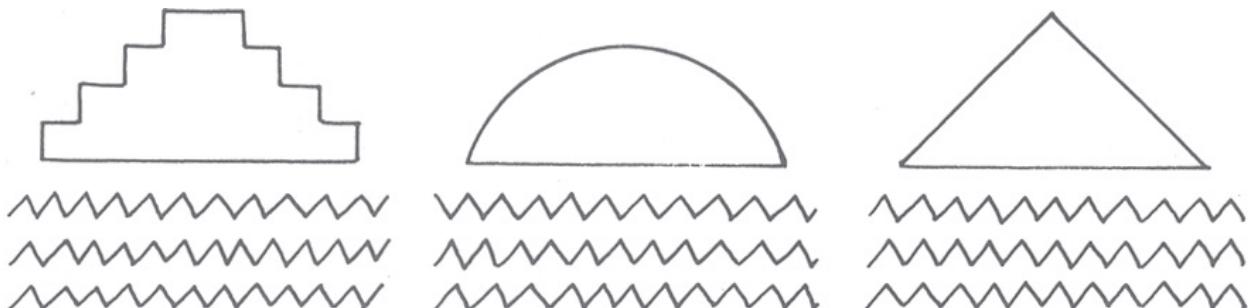
“Hurshanu” = the encircling sea

“Tehom” = the deep waters under the land

“Sheol” = the grave

“Tannin” = the sea monster

## Egyptian Conceptions



147. Various Egyptian representations of the primeval hill, the first entity to rise from the water of Chaos. The world evolved from the primeval hill. Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, trans. Timothy J. Hallett (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 114.

There are many commonalities between the Israelite conception of the cosmos and other ancient cultures. Namely, when the dry land emerges, it sits atop the waters (supported by pillars). According to the Hebrew Scriptures, the springs and rivers become the gift of God’s order—the “tamed” waters of chaos now made to serve God’s purposes. This explains the focus on the “river of Eden” which waters the garden and, after leaving the garden, splits into four (four points of the compass) to water the regions of the earth.

Because Eden is portrayed as the archetypal temple (see Temple theme video), the image is that from “heaven and earth united” flows the life-source of the entire cosmos. One of the rivers is called “Gihon” which is the name of the spring that provided water for Jerusalem, and for the temple itself. In the next section, let’s look closer at the rivers found in Genesis 2.

# The Rivers of Eden

There are four rivers described in Genesis 2:10-14. The description of these primordial rivers in Eden has an intentional literary design. Each river is described with decreasing length, imitating a spring running out over the land.

|   |                        |  |
|---|------------------------|--|
| <sup>10</sup> Now, a river went out from Eden to water the garden; and from there it separated and became four heads: |                        |  |
| 1   | A<br>B<br>a<br>b<br>a' | <sup>11</sup> The name of the <b>first</b> is Pishon (פִּישׁוֹן = "leaper/springer") it goes around the whole land of Havilah, which has there gold<br><sup>12</sup> and the gold of that land is good; there are the bdellium and the onyx stone. |
| 2   | A'<br>B'               | <sup>13</sup> and the name of the <b>second</b> river is Gihon (גִּיחוֹן = "gusher") it goes around the whole land of Cush.  |
| 3   | A'<br>B'               | <sup>14</sup> and the name of the <b>third</b> river is Tigris; it goes east of Assyria.   |
| 4   | A'<br>B'               | and the <b>fourth</b> river, it is the Euphrates.  |

Each of the names is associated with various regions of the ancient biblical map:

| RIVER     | REGION  | PEOPLE GROUPS AND EMPIRES              |
|-----------|---|--|
| Pishon    | Havilah = South and East of Canaan, the NW edge of the Arabian desert | Cainites, Ishmaelites, Edomites, Arabs |
| Gihon     | Cush = Southern Egypt, the upper Nile, Ethiopia                       | Egyptians and Ethiopians               |
| Hiddeqel  | Assyria = The Tigris River  | Assyria                                |
| Euphrates | Babylonian flood plains   | Babylon                                |

This Eden-sourced river prepares the reader to view each of these regions (Egypt, Jerusalem and surroundings, Mesopotamia) as extensions of the Eden's life-giving waters, places that are graced with the life of Eden. This makes perfect sense of the "Eden" analogies applied to Canaan (Genesis 13:10), Mesopotamia (Genesis 11:1-4), and Egypt (Genesis 13:10; 45:18, 20).

## Pishon [Genesis 2:11-12]

The Pishon is given the longest description, which prepares the reader to understand the significance of future stories:

- "Goes around the land of Havilah": where Ishmael's descendants will settle (Genesis 25:18) and where Hagar will wander in her flight from Sarah (Genesis 16:7)

- “Good gold” + “aromatic resin” + “onyx stone”: these are all associated with the symbolic “Eden-gifts” given to Israel in their wilderness wanderings:
  - “Gold” for the tabernacle
  - “Aromatic resin” (מִלְבָד) the appearance of the manna (Exod 16:33 and Num 11:7)
  - “Onyx stone” (מַהֲשֵׁב): the stones in the high priest’s ephod (Exod 25:7; 28:9)

## Gihon [Genesis 2:13]

The Gihon is the second river listed and is associated with the land of Cush.

- “Cush” has multiple referents in the Hebrew Bible
  - Southern Egypt (= modern Ethiopia): 2 Kings 19:9; Esther 1:1; 8:9; Psalm 68:31; Isaiah 18:1; 20:3-5; 45:14; Ezekiel 29:10; 30:4-5, 9; Nahum 3:9
  - The son of Ham, who has as his descendants people of southern Egypt: Genesis 10:6-7; but this very Cush is the father of Nimrod, who goes East to Mesopotamia to build the empires of Assyria and Babylon.
- The name of “Gihon” spring/river is only elsewhere associated with the spring that supplies water to Jerusalem and the temple (2 Chronicles 32:30; 33:14), which is where Solomon was crowned king of Israel (1 Kings 1:33, 38, 45).

## Hidequel and Euphrates [Genesis 2:14]

The Hidequel and Euphrates are associated with the two Mesopotamian empires:

- The Tigris flows “to the east of Assyria”
- The Euphrates is left to the reader’s imagination, which should be drawn toward Babylon.

## Eden as a Cosmic Mountain

The depiction of Eden as a high place, from which flows a river of divine life that provides life for all of the nations, is foundational for the biblical storyline. Eden is “heaven on earth” in the form of a cosmic high place, where the life of heaven is one with earth. How do scholars come to this conclusion? Let’s look at three key texts.

1. Eden is a high enough place for a river to flow out to water various distant regions of the land.

**Now, a river went out** from Eden **to water** the garden; and from there it separated and became four heads...

GENESIS 2:10

2. Eden is referred to by later biblical authors as a “mountain”.

“You were in **Eden**, the **garden of God**...you were on the **holy mountain of God**.”

EZEKIEL 28:13-14

3. The Jerusalem temple, which was designed as “heaven/Eden on earth,” was built on Mt. Zion, a high hill which is constantly likened to Eden.

“Blow the trumpet in **Zion**, sound the alarm on **my holy mountain**...before them [the army] the land is like the **garden of Eden**; behind them, a desert wasteland.”

JOEL 2:1-3

4. The heavenly Jerusalem, that is, renewed Eden on earth, is described as a high mountain garden-city that flows with the river of life.

There is **a river** whose streams make glad **the city of God**, the holy place where the Most High dwells.

PSALM 46:4

Great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise, in **the city of our God, his holy mountain**.

Beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth, like **the heights of Zion, the city of the Great King**.

PSALM 48:1-2

And wherever the **river** goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the **river** goes.

EZEKIEL 47:9

And in that day The **mountains will drip with sweet wine**, And the hills will flow with milk, And all the brooks of Judah will flow with water; And **a spring will go out from the house of the Lord** To water the valley of Shittim.

JOEL 3:18

“And he carried me away in the Spirit to **a mountain great and high**, and he showed me **the holy city**, Jerusalem coming down **out of heaven from God**.” “Then he showed me **a river of the water of life**, clear as crystal **coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb**.”

REVELATION 21:10 AND 22:1

*"In Genesis 2-3 Eden is not explicitly described as a mountain, but this can be best understood by a careful reading of many biblical texts that symbolically identify Eden with Zion. Through the temple ritual on Mt. Zion, the cosmic images of Eden became an earthly reality. Genesis 2:10-14 mentions the four great rivers that proceed from Eden and water all the earth. One of these cosmic streams is the Gihon, which appears only elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible in reference to the main source of Jerusalem's water... This connection between the Gihon of Eden and of Jerusalem is not the result of fuzzy or illogical mode of thought on the part of the biblical authors. This symbolic matching reflects Zion's cosmic and spiritual importance... The image of Jerusalem's cosmic stream is no more inappropriate than similar imagery applied to Jerusalem in Psalm 48:1-3 ("Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the entire earth, Mt. Zion in the far north") or Isaiah 2:1-4 ("Mt. Zion will be raised up as the highest of all mountains on earth"). In the symbolic world of Israel's temple liturgies, ordinary space became sacred space, the meager water spring of the city became a cosmic river, and the little knoll of Jerusalem became Mt. Zion, the highest mountain on the earth, and Jerusalem a peripheral city in the ancient world, became the center of the earth (Ezek 38:12)."*

GARY ANDERSON, "THE COSMIC MOUNTAIN: EDEN AND ITS  
EARLY INTERPRETERS IN SYRIAC CHRISTIANITY," 192-93.

## **Separated from the Waters of Life**

Once humanity rebels and is banished from the garden, people are separated from the waters of life; but God continues to reach out to people in surprising moments of grace, often by springs (Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness in Genesis 16) or wells (Abraham's servant and Rebekah in Genesis 24; Jacob and Rachel in Genesis 29; Moses and Zipporah in Exodus 2; Israel at Marah in Exodus 15). These are little "Eden gifts" appearing in the wilderness.

But the prophets hoped for a day of new creation, where the Jerusalem temple would become the place from which God's water of life would go out and recreate the world. Here are several prophetic snippets envisioning this renewal:

*For behold, in those days and at that time,  
When I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem,  
And in that day  
The mountains will drip with sweet wine,  
And the hills will flow with milk,  
And all the brooks of Judah will flow with water;  
And a spring will go out from the house of the Lord  
To water the valley of Shittim.*

JOEL 3:1,18

*The Lord will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing.*

ISAIAH 51:3 (NIV)

*"The desolate land will be cultivated instead of being a desolation in the sight of everyone who passes by. "They will say, 'This desolate land has become like the garden of Eden; and the waste, desolate and ruined cities are fortified and inhabited.'*

EZEKIEL 36:34-35

*It will come about that every living creature which swarms in every place where the river goes, will live. And there will be very many fish, for these waters go there and the others become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes.*

EZEKIEL 47:9

*In that day there will be no light; the luminaries will dwindle. For it will be a unique day which is known to the Lord, neither day nor night, but it will come about that at evening time there will be light.*

*And in that day living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea; it will be in summer as well as in winter.*

*And the Lord will be king over all the earth; in that day the Lord will be the only one, and His name the only one.*

ZECHARIAH 14:6-9

## **The Water of Life in the Gospel of John**

As we arrive in the Gospels, we see that Jesus is God and the reality toward which all of Israel's history points. The Gospel of John makes several intentional connections to Jesus as the water of life. Let's take a look.

### **Jesus is the Tabernacle [John 1:1-3,14]**

John opens his Gospel with a bold claim: Jesus is the tabernacle and therefore the source of the water of life.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>And the Word became flesh, and dwelt (Grk. ἐσκήνωσεν) among us, and we saw his glory (Grk. δόξα), glory as of the one and only from the Father...</p> <p>JOHN 1:14 A</p> | <p>"Have them make a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell (Heb. shakan) among them. According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle (Heb. mishkan // Grk. τῆς σκηνῆς) and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it.</p> <p>EXODUS 25:8-9</p> <p><i>I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an eternal covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place (Heb. mishkan // Grk. κατασκήνωσίς) will be with them and I will be their God and they will be my people</i></p> <p>EZEKIEL 37:26-27</p> |
|---|--|

## Jesus Offers Living Water to the Woman at the Well [4:7-15]

The next story clearly connected to the water of life theme is when Jesus encounters the woman at the well. In a shocking turn of events, he offers the woman living water—from *himself*. This passage is full of connections to previous parts of the biblical narrative:

- The mention of “the well of Jacob” (πηγὴ τοῦ Ἰακοῦ) in 4:6 assumes an entire network of Scriptural texts that are connected by a design pattern going back to the river of Eden and the future temple of the messianic age.
  - **Genesis 2:6:** “A spring/flow (Heb. נָתַת / Grk. πηγὴ [!]) came up from the ground and watered (Grk. ποτίζειν) the face of the land. // Gen 2:10-14: “A river went out of Eden to water (Grk. ποτίζειν) the garden, and from there it divided and became four heads...”
  - This divine source of living water that gave life to Eden went out from Eden and is encountered by characters throughout the story of Genesis in the form of “wells” and “springs”:
    - **Genesis 16:7,14:** Hagar encounters the angel of Yahweh at a “spring of water” (Heb. עַن מִם / Grk. πηγὴ ὑδατος), and she calls the spring “Well of the living One who sees me” (Heb. בָּאֵר לְחֵי רָאֵי / Grk. φρέαρ οὐδὲνώπιον εἶδον).
    - **Genesis 21:19:** Hagar’s eyes are opened in the wilderness to see a “well of water” (Heb. מִם, but in LXX “a well of living water” (Grk. φρέαρ ὑδατος ζῶντος).
    - **Genesis 21:25,30:** Abraham dug a well near Beersheba and had to contend with Abimelech.
    - **Gen 24:11:** Abraham’s servant meets Rebekah at a 24:11 a “well of water” (Heb. מִם / Grk. φρέαρ ὑδατος).

- **Genesis 26:12-25:** Isaac sows an abundant harvest in the land of Gerar, and discovers many wells that his father had already dug (26:18) and he must quarrel with the Philistines over who truly owns the wells. Finally, his own well (26:22) provides “fruitfulness in the land.” (// Eden).
- **Genesis 29:1-12:** Jacob flees to Haran and meets Rachel at a “well in the field” (Heb. בָּבֶן שָׂדֶה), but there is a “great stone on the mouth of the well” (29:2). Jacob must roll back the stone so that the shepherds can water the flock.
- Wells and springs of water are often provided by God for Israel in the wilderness:
  - **Exodus 15-16:** Moses and the nation of Israel have several interactions with water as they flee Egypt.
  - **Numbers 21:** The Israelites discover a well in their wilderness wanderings.
    - **Numbers 21:16-18:** *From there they continued to Beer, that is the well where the Lord said to Moses, “Assemble the people, that I may give them water to drink (Grk. καὶ δώσω αὐτοῖς ὕδωρ πιεῖν).” Then Israel sang this song: “Spring up, O well! Sing to it! The well, which the leaders sank, Which the nobles of the people dug, With the scepter and with their staffs.” And from the wilderness they continued to Mattanah.*
    - The well provides them with water to journey on to Mattanah (מַתָּנָה), which is the Hebrew word for “gift.”
    - Jesus seems to allude to this tradition when he says to the Samaritan woman: “If you knew the gift (Grk. δωρεαν) of God...you would have asked [me] to give you living water” (John 4:10).
  - In the prophets, these themes are projected forward into the hope of the new Eden/Jerusalem/Temple (See **Joel 3:18; Ezekiel 47:1,9,12; Zechariah 14:8**).
  - The story of Jesus meeting the woman at the well also fits into a design pattern in Genesis of men meeting their wives at wells of water
    - **Genesis 2:10-14, 18-24:** God provides a wife for human in Eden near the spring of the river

- **Genesis 24:** Abraham's servant goes to Haran and meets Rebekah at a well:

- **24:11:** The servant arrives at a “well of water” (Heb. בָּבֶן מַיִם / Grk. φρέαρ ὕδατος), and prays (24:13) that God would send a young woman to “draw water” (Grk. ἀντλήσατε ὕδωρ).
- **24:17-18:** The servant meets Rebekah and says “Water me with a little water from your jar” (Grk. Πότισόν με μικρὸν ὕδωρ ἐκ τῆς ύδριας σου) and she responds, “Drink, my lord” (Grk. Πίε, κύριε).
- **Genesis 28-29:** Jacob's well experience:
  - **29:1-12:** Jacob meets Rachel at the well, over which is a “great stone” (Heb. בָּבֶן / Grk. λίθος). Jacob removes the stone and he waters (Grk. ποτίζειν) Rachel's flocks (29:10)
  - **28:10-22:** In the story preceding Jacob's meeting of Rachel, Jacob had just left Beersheba (= “well of seven” from Abraham's well in Gen 21:25, 30), and he takes “stones of the place” (Grk. τῶν λίθων τοῦ τόπου, 28:11) and falls asleep upon them. In his dream, the stones become the foundation of a temple that unites heaven and earth (// Eden), and God promises to Jacob the divine blessing of Eden (28:13-14), so Jacob builds a stone pillar and calls the place “house of God” (Heb. בֵּית לְאָה / Grk. οἶκος θεοῦ / Eng. beth-el).
- **Exodus 2:** Moses meets Zipporah at a well.

What do we make of all these links? In the woman at the well story in chapter 4, John has brought together all two networks of scriptural patterns:

1. The Eden-River // Wells of living water // The house of God // the New Eden-Temple river
2. The Man and Woman becoming One in Eden to fulfill God's purpose.

**Interpretive Note:** Jewish interpretive traditions noted the design pattern of Abraham (Gen 21) and Isaac (Gen 26) discovering wells that release the blessing of Eden in their exile, and so they read the story of Jacob's dream (Gen 28:10-22) and his discovery of the well in Haran (Gen 29:1-12) as mutually interpretive:

*Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer (ch. 35): Rabbi 'Akiba said: Every place where our forefathers went, the well went in front of them, and they dug three times and found it before them. Abraham dug three times and found it before him, as it is said, "And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham" (ibid. xxvi. 18). And Isaac dug in the land (of Canaan) four times, and found it before him, as it is said, "And Isaac's servants digged in the valley" (ibid. 19). And it is written about Jerusalem, "And it shall come to pass in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem" (Zech. xiv. 8). This refers to the well which will arise in Jerusalem in the future, and will water all its surroundings. Because they found (the well) seven times, he called it Shib'ah (seven). Jacob was seventy-seven years old when he went forth from his father's house, and the well went before him. From Beer-Sheba as far as Mount Moriah is a journey of two days."*

*Targum Neofiti to Genesis 28:10 (the list of five miracles that happened in "the place"): And the second miracle: the stones which our father Jacob took and placed under his head-pillow, when he arose in the morning he found all of them had become one stone. This is the stone which he erected as a pillar and he poured oil over the upper part of it. And the third miracle: when our father Jacob raised his feet to go to Haran the earth shrank before him and he was found dwelling in Haran. And the fourth miracle: the stone which all the pastors had come together to roll away from over the mouth of the well and could not, when our father Jacob came he raised it with one hand and gave to drink to the flock of Laban, his mother's brother. And the fifth: when our father Jacob raised the stone from above the mouth of the well, the well overflowed and came up to its mouth, and was overflowing for twenty years—all the days that he dwelt in Haran."*

## **Jesus offers the water of life at the feast of tabernacles [John 7:37-38]**

Let's look at the hyper-literal translation of this curious passage:

*If someone is thirsty, let them come to me  
and let them drink the one who believes in me  
just as the scripture says, "Rivers from his belly will flow living water."*

7:37B-38 HYPER-LITERAL TRANSLATION

### **Key Interpretive Questions:**

1. Whose belly will flow with water? The believer's (from the previous statement)? Or an unmarked subject assumed in the quotation?
2. What exactly is the wording of the Scripture quotation, and what is its source?

## Two Interpretive Options:

| OPTION 1   | OPTION 2  |
|--|---|
| <p>The believer is the source of the living water (NIV, so also NASB, ESV, NRSV).</p> <p><i>"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.</i></p> | <p>The believer drinks the water, which comes from a source indicated in the Scripture quotation (NLT).</p> <p><i>"Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.'</i></p> |

## What is the source of the Scripture quotation in John 7:38?

It is not a proper citation, but a thematic summary of a number of scriptural texts triggered by the allusion to Isaiah 55: Jesus is the source of divine provision for whoever will come to him in repentance, so that they can participate in the New Exodus.

| JESUS' CALL TO THE JEWISH LEADERS   | THE PROPHETS' CALL TO REPENTANCE   |
|---|--|
| <p><i>"Yet a little time I am with you, then I return to the one who sent me. You will <b>seek me</b>, but you will not <b>find</b> me.</i></p> <p>JOHN 7:33-34</p> | <p><b>Seek the Lord</b> while he can be <b>found</b>,<br/>call upon him, as long as he is near.</p> <p>ISAIAH 55:6</p>   |
| <p><b>If anyone is thirsty</b>, let them <b>come</b> to me!<br/>and the one who believes, let them <b>drink!</b></p> <p>JOHN 7:37-38A</p>                           | <p><b>Hoy! Anyone who is thirsty, come</b> to the <b>waters!</b><br/>And you who have no money <b>come</b>, buy and eat!<br/><b>Come</b>, buy wine and milk<br/>Without money and without cost!</p> <p>ISAIAH 55:1</p> |

**Scriptural Matrix #1:** Jesus is the true and ultimate temple, which will flow with living water into the new creation. **But**, this does not explain the reference to “his belly.”

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>If someone is thirsty,<br/>let them come to me<br/>and let them drink<br/>the one who believes in me<br/>just as the scripture says,<br/><b>“Rivers from his belly will flow living water.”</b></p> | <p>And in that day<br/>The mountains will drip with sweet wine,<br/>And the hills will flow with milk,<br/>And all the brooks of Judah will flow with water;<br/>And <b>a spring will go out from the house of the Lord</b><br/>To water the valley of Shittim.</p>   |
| <p>JOHN 7:37B-38</p>   | <p>JOEL 3:18</p> <p>1 The man brought me back to the entrance to the temple,<br/>and <b>I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple</b> toward the east...</p> <p>9 “It will come about that every living creature which swarms in <b>every place where the river goes, will live</b>. And there will be very many fish, for these waters go there and... <b>everything will live where the river goes.</b></p> <p>12 “By the river on its bank, on one side and on the other, will grow all trees for food. Their leaves will not wither and their fruit will not fail. They will bear every month because <b>their water goes out from the sanctuary</b>, and their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing.”</p> |
|  | <p>EZEKIEL 47:1, 9, 12</p> <p>And in that day <b>living waters will flow out of Jerusalem</b>, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea; it will be in summer as well as in winter.</p>  |

**Scriptural Matrix #2:** Jesus is the rock in the wilderness, when it was struck in order to provide God's people with living water as they journey to the promised land. This explains the reference to "his belly," in that John is setting Jesus' crucifixion on analogy to the struck rock in the wilderness.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>If someone is thirsty, let them come to me and let them drink the one who believes in me just as the scripture says,<br/> <b>"Rivers from his belly will flow</b> (LXX πειω) <b>living water.</b>"</p>  | <p>15 He split the rocks in the wilderness<br/>     And gave them abundant drink like the ocean depths.<br/>     16 He brought forth <b>streams also from the rock</b><br/>     And caused <b>waters to run down like rivers...</b><br/>     19 Then they spoke against God;<br/>     They said, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?<br/>     "Behold, <b>he struck the rock so that waters flowed</b> (LXX πειω) <b>out,</b><br/>     And streams were overflowing;</p> |
| <p>JOHN 7:37B-38</p> <p>Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."<br/>     The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking of <b>the temple of His body.</b></p> <p>JOHN 2:19-21</p> <p>"But one of the soldiers <b>pierced His side</b> with a spear, and immediately <b>blood and water came out.</b>"</p> <p>JOHN 19:34</p> | <p>PSALM 78:15-16, 19-20</p> <p>He <b>opened the rock and water flowed</b> (LXX πειω) <b>out;</b><br/>     It ran in the dry places like a river.</p> <p>PSALM 105:41</p> <p>They did not thirst when He led them through the deserts.<br/>     He made the water flow out of the rock for them;<br/>     He <b>split the rock and the water flowed</b> (LXX πειω) <b>out.</b></p> <p>ISAIAH 48:21</p>   |

**Note:** There existed an ancient Jewish interpretive tradition that equated the God of Israel with the rock of Meribah that provided water for the people.

| MOSES STRIKES THE ROCK IN THE WILDERNESS  | YAHWEH IS ISRAEL'S ROCK   |
|---|---|
| <p>Then the Lord said to Moses: "Behold, <b>I will stand before you there upon the rock</b> at Horeb; and <b>you shall strike the rock</b>, and <b>water will come out</b> of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. He named the place Massah and Meribah.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">EXODUS 17:6-7</p>  | <p>The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DEUTERONOMY 32:4</p>   |
| <p>The Lord spoke to Moses, "<b>Take the rod</b>; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation <b>and speak to the rock</b> before their eyes, <b>that it may give its water</b>. You shall thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink."</p> <p>So <b>Moses took the rod</b> from before the Lord,</p> <p>Then Moses <b>lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice</b> with his rod; and <b>water came forth</b> abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank. But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." Those were the waters of Meribah</p> <p style="text-align: center;">NUMBERS 20:1-13</p> | <p>They remembered that God was their Rock.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PSALM 78:35</p> <p>Let us make a joyful noise to the Rock of our salvation.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PSALM 95:1</p> <p>Is there a God beside me? There is no Rock I know of none. Jesus is the Rock in the wilderness that was struck to provide water.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ISAIAH 44:8</p> <p>Our ancestors drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, <b>and the rock was the Messiah</b>.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">1 CORINTHIANS 10:4</p> |
|   | <p>Aramaic Targum (Pseudo-Jonathan) to <b>Numbers 21:19</b>: And because it (the well) was given to them as a gift, it turned to ascend the high mountains with them, and from the high mountains it descended with them to the valleys, going around the entire camp of Israel and giving them drink, each and every one of them at the door of his tent</p>   |

"Jesus is associating himself with the rock of Meribah, which will be "struck" (that is, killed) in order to supply life-giving water for his people... Supporting this is John's report about the piercing of Jesus' side on the cross (John 19:34). Many commentators have discerned a thematic linkage between John 7:37-39 and 19:34, such that the water and blood flowing from Jesus' side after being struck by the spear is a symbolic fulfillment of Jesus' words about living water. It also makes sense of the future tense of "will flow" in John 7:37. The wording about the flow of water and blood in 19:34 seems calculated to recall Jesus' words in 7:38 in order to indicate the symbolic fulfillment of this promise at the moment of his death."

GERRY WHEATON, THE JEWISH FEASTS IN JOHN'S GOSPEL, 156-57.

How can we land the plane with the variety of Scriptures so far? It would appear the author wants the readers to see Jesus as the giver of the water of life (John 4 woman at the well; John 8 “whoever comes to me will never thirst) and the crucifixion is where Jesus pours out the ‘water of life’ when he is pierced by the soldier. Let’s take a closer look at this passage in the next section.

## Jesus Dies as the New Temple [John 19:34-35]

The imagery found in chapter 19 is the climax of the series of “water” and “blood” images in the Gospel of John.

- **Blood [the word itself ἄιματος and related images]**

- **John 1:12-13:** But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.
- **John 1:29:** “The next day [John the baptist] saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”
- **John 6:53-56:** “So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.”

- **Water**

- **John 1:32-33:** John testified saying, “I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. “I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’
- **John 2:6, 9:** Now there were six stone jars of water set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each... When the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew)...
- **John 4:13-14:** Jesus answered and said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.”

- **John 7:37-39:** Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and let the one who believes in me drink. As the Scripture has said, ‘From his belly will flow rivers of living water.’ ” Now, he said this about the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

- **Key Hebrew Bible texts for the water imagery**

- **Ezekiel 47:1-2:** Then he brought me back to the door of the house; and behold, water was flowing from under the threshold of the house toward the east, for the house faced east. And the water was flowing down from under, from the right side (גָּתָה) of the house, from south of the altar. He brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces east. And behold, water was trickling from the south side (גָּתָה).
- The Old Greek translators of Ezekiel also use the word for “**side**” (**πλευρα**) to render the “sides” of Ezekiel’s temple (Heb. 26,9,8,7,6,41:5: (**υλζ**)).
- “In Jesus’ death the ‘inner chamber’ of his body/Temple is opened, releasing the waters of the Spirit. While one temple is in the process of being destroyed (his body), a new Temple is being raised. Architectural imagery is employed to convey a theology of the Spirit who dwells within Jesus and will now dwell within the disciples. The waters of Ezekiel’s Temple issued forth into the land, vivifying (Ezek 47:9), nourishing, and healing (Ezek 47:12). The new Temple, endowed with the Spirit, will be an ongoing source within the world of life-giving waters (John 4:14; 7:38) and cleansing from sin (John 20:23).

## Revelation 21-22

The closing chapter of Scripture portrays a renewed cosmos. We see the new creation is permeated by the river of life, coming from the throne.

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea.*

*And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.*

REVELATION 21:1-2

Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

REVELATION 22:1-2

In Genesis 2:10 a river “flowed from Eden” to “water the garden,” but “life” was restricted to the “tree of life” (2:9; 3:22–24). Here there is not only the “tree of life” but ποταμὸν ὑδατος ζῷῆς (potamon hydatos zōēs, the river of the water of life—anarthrous in order to stress the theological force of the idea). In Genesis the river flowed “out of [ἐκ, ek, in the LXX] Eden,” but here it flows “out of [also ἐκ] the throne.” Eden has become one with the city. The background is not only Genesis but also Ezekiel 47:1–12, where a river flows from the south of the altar in the renewed temple and turns everything it touches fresh, even salt water, so that living creatures and fish flourish. Ezekiel 47 provides the primary background for Revelation 22:1–2, and it pictures the life-giving presence of God among his people in the renewed temple as an Edenlike river flowing from the renewed temple. Also, in Zechariah 14:8 “living water will flow out from Jerusalem” on the “day of Yahweh.” ... While the river in Genesis 2 flowed out of the garden, and the river in Ezekiel 47 flowed out of the temple, this river flows “from the throne of God and the Lamb.” Thus, the source of this river is God himself.

GRANT R. OSBORNE, REVELATION, BAKER EXEGETICAL COMMENTARY ON THE NEW TESTAMENT (GRAND RAPIDS, MI: BAKER ACADEMIC, 2002), 769.

## Sources

Gary Anderson, “The Cosmic Mountain: Eden and Its Early Interpreters in Syriac Christianity,” 192–93.

Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 769.

Michael Morales, *Tabernacle Prefigured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus*, 54–55.

# Samaritan Woman

- By this point, readers may be wondering what kind of marriage story this will be. It certainly can't be a typical one because the dialogue that follows highlights the relational distance between these two parties.
- When Jesus asks the woman for a drink, she herself says that, "Jews do not associate with Samaritans." The mention of five husbands also subverts the possibility of what we typically expect from this well-meeting pattern.
- But what happens next is surprising: Jesus describes an incredible future bond between Jews, Samaritans, and all true worshipers with the Father. This is a different kind of marriage bond than we expected. The woman continues, saying that when the Messiah comes, he will explain all these things. And Jesus responds, "I, the one speaking to you, am he." In the book of John, this foreign, outcast woman is the first to whom Jesus reveals his identity.
- **News:** And she immediately leaves her water jar and shares the good news about who Jesus is with her people. The news, however, is not the arrival of a person who will be united with one woman; it's the good news of the messiah's arrival and his uniting involves all who would come to Him for life.

# Samaritan Woman

- **Well meeting pattern:**

- **Hospitality:** Jesus stayed with the Samaritans for two days (John 4:39-40). Food is even mentioned in this section. The disciples keep urging Jesus to eat something and Jesus replies that his food is to do his Father's work (John 4:31-34).
  - Rather than feasting, Jesus says that the harvest is ready — many Samaritans believed because of the news of the woman.
- **Joining:** Rather than one man joined with one woman, she persuades many in her community to follow her and join themselves with Jesus.
  - Remember that Jesus is described as the bridegroom in John 3:27-30.