

**PART 4 — EN GEDI, AN OASIS IN THE MIDDLE
OF THE DESERT BETWEEN JERUSALEM AND THE DEAD SEA**

THE IN-BETWEEN

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En Gedi**

In the midst of the harsh Judean wilderness, this oasis is where David hid from King Saul and likely authored many of the Psalms over 1,000 years before Jesus' birth.



ANCHOR TEXT: Take a moment to read Psalm 57 before you dive into the teaching.

EN GEDI

Many of us grew up hearing the story of David, the shepherd boy who would reign in Israel as a warrior king. We remember his victory over Goliath (1 Samuel 17:49), his conquering of Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:7), and the many psalms he sang (23:1-2). This great man was the only person in the Bible who was called a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14).

In light of David's many victories and exploits, we may be less inclined to remember **En Gedi**, the spring where David and his mighty men took refuge while they were running from King Saul (1 Samuel 23:29). This place is only 35 miles east of Jerusalem, but it takes quite a hike to get here. Carved into the steep canyons hundreds of feet above the shores of the **Dead Sea**, En Gedi is a lush oasis hidden in one of the driest, harshest regions on the planet.



En Gedi

Home to many ibex, a type of goat with large horns, En Gedi literally means "spring of the wild goat."



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A Long and Winding Road

Even with the help of centuries-old steps carved in the rugged crags, the steep climb up to the spring of En Gedi is challenging and treacherous.

One reason David chose this place was for its intricate system of caves, carved out of the rock by many pools formed from one spring. What appeared to be an unsuspecting hole in the side of the canyon opened up into a series of tunnels through the Judean hills, providing multiple escape routes for the few people who knew them well. This was the perfect hideaway for a rugged warrior like David.

But the meaning of this place deepens when we consider what was happening in David's life as he hid among these caves.

When David was a boy, King Saul was on the throne, the first monarch to unite the tribes of Israel as a single nation (1 Samuel 10:24). But Saul's heart turned from God toward pride and idolatry, so the Lord rejected him and revoked his crown (15:26). The Lord told Samuel, the same prophet who had anointed Saul as king years before, to visit a man named Jesse in the town of **Bethlehem**. One of Jesse's sons would become the next king of Israel.

Out of Jesse's eight sons, the Lord chose David, the youngest (1 Samuel 16:11-12). King Saul was a tall, broad-shouldered warrior with commanding authority (1 Samuel 9:2), but David was just a young kid, between 9 and 15 years old. At the Lord's command, Samuel anointed David's head with oil, securing his future claim to the throne (16:13).

In the meantime, however, Saul was still king. David would not be crowned until much later, when he was 30 years old (2 Samuel 5:4). For nearly two decades he waited. As Saul became increasingly paranoid and David, then a full-grown man, had to flee for his life, he must have had many questions. God had prepared him all these years to receive the crown. But when would it finally be his?

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Dead Sea

Beneath En Gedi lies the Dead Sea, the lowest place on earth. The Jordan River ends here, carrying many minerals with it. This causes the Dead Sea to be 10 times as salty as the ocean.



The in-between seasons of life can be some of the hardest. When we're waiting on God to open a door or answer a longstanding prayer, we can become discouraged. Often, these waiting seasons come with moments of questioning: *Has God given up on me? Am I doing something wrong? How long, O Lord?* Sometimes, we're tempted to give up on God altogether.

What did David do with his in-between moments? He worshiped.

It was in the caves and valleys of En Gedi that David wrote some of the Psalms, prayers passed down for God's people to use in all ages. When it felt like the waiting would never end and when David feared for his life, he penned these words (Psalm 57:1):

*"Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me, for in you I take refuge.
I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed."*

David knew what to do with the in-between. He lifted his eyes up from his shifting circumstances and set his gaze firmly on His great and faithful God.

Maybe David remembered God's faithfulness toward Joseph, the chosen son who was thrown into a pit, sold into slavery, and put in prison. Throughout Joseph's trials, the Bible echoes with one powerful refrain: "the LORD was with Joseph" (Genesis 39:2,23). In God's hands, the darkest moments of Joseph's life were the trials that shaped him into the leader who would save millions of lives during a great drought (45:4-7). No hard season went to waste and everything happened according to plan. What God had promised from the beginning of Joseph's life, what He had developed in the in-between, He saw

through to the end. It was true for Joseph and it was true for David, too.

As David poured out his heart to God in these moments of frustration and fear, of agitation and desperation, he always brought his prayers to a close with praise (Psalm 57:9-11):

*"I will praise you, Lord, among the nations;
I will sing of you among the peoples.
For great is your love, reaching to the heavens;
Your faithfulness reaches to the skies.
Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
let your glory be over all the earth."*

David knew even the in-between moments mattered. His mighty men came to realize it, too. Those warriors who hid with David at En Gedi saw his example of faithfulness and his dependence on God. In these moments, God was shaping David into the man he needed to be: the mighty king of Israel who knew how to trust God with the in-between.

Many of the Psalms David wrote included prophetic verses that would not be fulfilled until Jesus walked onto the scene a thousand years later. Even as the perfect Son of God, Christ "learned obedience from what he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8). Like King David before Him, the King of kings understood that even the in-between moments bore eternal purpose in the loving hands of His Father.

Through His trials, Jesus became the Redeemer who entered our humanity and empathizes with our pain, the One "who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Looking to Jesus, we can find strength to press on. We can be faithful, we can keep trusting, because the God of the in-between is the God who always comes through.



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**BE FAITHFUL.
 KEEP TRUSTING.**
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 GOD WHO ALWAYS COMES THROUGH.**
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- ¹ What in-between season have you found yourself in lately—either right now, or recently? Where do you look for hope and purpose in the midst of it?
- ² How have previous in-between moments of your life shaped you into the person you are today? Have these moments affected your relationship with God?
- ³ What does it look like to worship God in the in-between moments of your life? How can you express your trust and dependence on Him in your darkest and heaviest moments?
- ⁴ It's comforting and encouraging to know that Jesus has gone through trials like ours. He knows our pain. Do you know someone who is walking through a challenging transition or a dry season right now? How can you pray for that person, comfort them, or encourage them with the truth about Jesus?
- ⁵ Read Psalm 57. David wrote this Psalm when he went into hiding from Saul. If you could write a psalm now, what would the theme of your psalm be?

🕒 EXTRA INFO

One of the reasons behind the Dead Sea's name is the high mineral content of its water. The rich sediment flowing down from the Jordan River has nowhere else left to go, so it settles here, rendering the water poisonous and unable to sustain life. However, these mineral deposits are very valuable for creating healing salves and ointments. Medicinal plants also grow near the spring of En Gedi (Song of Solomon 1:14). This area, which first appears so full of death and despair, can actually be a source of life and healing.

The Bible contains hundreds of references to the desert and the wilderness. All throughout Scripture, the desert is where God's people receive their identity. It's in the wasteland by the Jabbok River that Jacob wrestled with God to receive the name of Israel (Genesis 32:28). In the desert of Sinai, the redeemed slaves of Egypt became the chosen people of God (Deuteronomy 7:6). In the Judean wilderness, David the outlaw would become Israel's great king (1 Samuel 24:20). In that very same wilderness, Jesus began His victory over Satan (Matthew 4:10-11).

David uses the term "refuge" more than 40 times in the Psalms. At En Gedi, he learned that God was present and faithful even when everything else was stripped away. The Lord was his refuge, the God of the in-between, to whom he could turn again and again:

Psalm 9:9: "The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble."

Psalm 18:2: "The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."

Psalm 57:1: "Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me, for in you I take refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed."