

Lord, Teach Me in the Wilderness

Key Scripture:

"For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from the spiritual rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well pleased, for they were laid low in the wilderness. Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved..." 1 Cor. 10:1-6

Portion for the Journey:

...Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come." 1 Cor. 10: 11 The Word is clear that God allowed the Israelites to be overthrown in the wilderness as an example and a warning to us. The very soberness of this warning is seen in the next verse which states, "Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall." It is vital that we seek the LORD to understand everything He wanted us to learn through their example. Why were the Israelites laid low in the wilderness? What does God want us to learn from them so we pass His tests when we find ourselves in the wilderness? Read Heb. 4:11

As we journey through this life, all believers find themselves in the wilderness at least once in their spiritual lives. You may be in the wilderness now. If you do not understand God's purposes in the wilderness, it can be a place of incredible danger, confusion, isolation, and separation. The wilderness is a testing place that can lead to discouragement and loss of faith or it can be an amazing time of spiritual growth where we emerge leaning on the arm of our Beloved Lord. (Song of Solomon 8:5) Recognizing that we are in the wilderness is the first step to understanding what lies ahead and the choices we must make.

There are no clear signposts to announce your admittance to the wilderness or time of testing!

Believers have offered the following descriptions of their wilderness experiences. Have you experienced any of these descriptions? How did you respond?

- Your sense of the nearness of God is gone
- You find yourself removed from the familiar and comfortable
- Natural sources of supply and support may be cut off or limited
- He separates us from human assistance
- Loss of connection with others who were supportive in the past
- Disoriented or displaced
- Feeling of being exiled into a place of obscurity and nothingness
- Feeling of being out of control or inadequate
- Sense of silence from God.
- Heavens are as brass – it feels like God is not listening
- Prayers seem to reach no higher than the ceiling. Sense of barrenness in prayer.
- Intimacy is gone
- Feeling of being alone and isolated

- Feeling of being out of place
- Suffer feelings of spiritual rejection, separation or abandonment by God
- Enemy comes in with accusations, lies, attacks and temptation
- Feelings of failure, disillusionment and depression
- Deadness
- Spiritual Darkness

How did I get in the wilderness? There are generally three reasons we are in the wilderness.

- 1) Those who are not born again are perpetually lost in the wilderness! There are many people who think they are Christians but who have not truly committed their lives to the LORD in faith. If they cry out to the LORD, He will find them and lead them to green pastures.
- 2) We are a believer but have allowed our sins to separate us from God. In this case, our path back to the Lord is through true repentance and confession of our sins and drawing near to the LORD.
- 3) God initiates our wilderness experience. He is often the one who leads us into the wilderness. Let the knowledge of this encourage and strengthen your heart!! The wilderness is a place where we can make tremendous growth and draw closer to the LORD if we carefully heed God's Word.

- "Also, I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and led you forty years through the wilderness...." Amos 2:10
- "Jesus was led [impelled, driven or sent out] by the Spirit into the wilderness." The phrase contains a sense of urgency synonymous with pushing, driving, thrusting forth out into the wilderness. Matt. 4:1; Mark 1:12-13
- "... I will allure her, bring her into the wilderness...speak kindly to her." Hos. 2:14

What is “the wilderness?” The wilderness, synonymous with ‘desert,’ is referred to in the Scripture almost 300 times. Physically, it is a place of desolation and isolation away from the refinements of civilization. Spiritually, the wilderness is a place of breaking, discipline, testing, instruction and rebuilding. We are led on an uncharted journey in which our comfort and security vanishes and our only hope is to trust and obey the LORD God.

The Hebrew word for “wilderness” or “desert” is ‘midbar’ (#4059) coming from the root word ‘dabar’ (#1696) which means to declare, counsel, discuss, promised, pronounced, talk or utter. Hence it is in the wilderness that God reveals Himself to us and speaks to our hearts. The wilderness can become a place of life-giving inspiration direction, wisdom and revelation.

The Bible provides many “word pictures” of the physical wilderness to help us understand this spiritual concept. When you think of a “wilderness” in the physical realm what comes to your mind? Meditate on these facets of the wilderness and how they can apply to our own lives. What kinds of problems might you encounter in a real wilderness trip that corresponds to the spiritual wilderness? How does this compare to our call to become separated from the world? Gen. 12:1

- The desert or a most desolate place
- An uncomfortable place where weather and geographic conditions are less than idealistic
- An undeveloped area “not significantly modified by human activity”
- An area not controlled or inhabited by humans
- An undeveloped area with no roads, maps or pathways

- Food and water can be extremely scarce or hidden
- Uncultivated and unfruitful land
- A place of solitude, isolation or loneliness
- A place traversed by necessity to get from one setting to another
- A place filled with many fiery, poisonous serpents and vipers

Know that the Lord has great concern for those who are in the wilderness! When Jesus saw the people, "... He felt compassion for them, because they were **bewildered** (harassed and distressed and dejected and helpless) like sheep without a shepherd. Matt. 9:36 The word "bewildered" has a very interesting origin. It is an old English word that means, 'to lead into perplexity, confusion and uncertainty. To be lost in pathless places, to confound for want of a place or road. To perplex with mazes. To be led astray, lured into the wilds, wilderness. To bewilder means to face a situation which has potential to cause to stumble or to amaze.' Have you ever felt "bewildered" in your spiritual walk?

What are some of God's ways in the wilderness?

It is never God's intention to leave us in this state of desolation! God does not lead us into the wilderness to abandon or punish us. He uses this as a time of breaking, testing and purification. It is in the wilderness that God wants to teach us to live by every word that proceeds out of His mouth. In the wilderness, we come to realize that God has not abandoned us, but brought us to a place where He can get our attention and we can draw close to Him. When we understand God's ways in the wilderness, we should feel encouraged, because this isolation is meant to draw us closer to Him. Moses Asamoah, in his book, "Sweetly Broken," says, "our time in the wilderness is that time in our walk with the LORD when our road becomes very narrow—wide enough only for you and God so that God can have His fullest and most personal time with you."

1. In the wilderness, God exposes our flesh and allow us to confront our sin nature. The Word says the heart is deceitful above all else. We do not always know what is in our own hearts until the LORD shows us. It is possible to deceive others and ourselves by making our flesh more presentable and put on a façade of spirituality that allows us to find acceptance amongst believers. We hide the flesh rather than crucify it. Paul instructed the Corinthians that they were still walking like mere men, men of the flesh, not able to partake of true spiritual meat because they were still carnal. When He brings us into the wilderness, He strips away all of the supports upon which the flesh relies and allows our sin to be exposed.

2. In the wilderness, God tests us to see if we will choose to walk by faith in His Word and promises. God places us in situations that will test us to see whether we will respond in faith and trust in Him, or if we will respond according to our flesh. Tests are opportunities to exercise our faith! If we yield to Him and choose to walk through the wilderness trusting and obeying His Word in faith, we will be blessed and prepared. If we walk as Israel walked, and refuse to unite His words in our hearts with faith, we will also fail and potentially die in the wilderness. Note the specific choices Israel made while in the wilderness that caused them to be laid low. It is easy to find fault in their behavior, but how can we learn from their decisions and how should we respond differently? How would choosing to walk by faith in the LORD have changed their responses in these situations? 1 Cor. 3:1-3; Luke 1:45

3. The Wilderness tests and reveals the quality of our faith in the LORD. Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness with the LORD and failed to learn His lessons. Other than Joshua and Caleb, none of the entire generation of Israelites who left Israel made it out of the wilderness into the promised land! 1 Cor. 10:1-6,11 says that they were "laid low" in the wilderness. The word for "laid low" also means

"overthrown." Heb. 4:2 tells us that they had the "good news" preached to them, **but the word "did not profit them because it was not united by faith in those who heard it."** Keep in mind, God wants us to learn from Israel's experience in the wilderness, how do their experiences apply in our lives? One of the most often repeated verses in the Bible states, "The righteous live by faith." What situations showed their faith or lack of faith? Do you live by faith? What choices can we make in order to pass these tests? How can knowing we are being tested in the wilderness help us to succeed where Israel failed? Isa. 26:2, Rom. 3:26; Rom. 10:10 (AMP); Hab. 2:4; Heb. 10:38; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11

The Word is full of references to Israel's time in the wilderness and provides us with a vivid description of their lives, but also provides us with a catalog of their sin. God does not want us to be like them, a people He referred to as "a stubborn and rebellious generation." Read these passages and ask the LORD to reveal your sins so you will not grieve His heart or be laid low in the wilderness. You can pray as David prayed in Ps. 106: 6, "We have sinned like our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have behaved wickedly." Confess your sins in a spirit of repentance and know that He is faithful and will cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Ps. 78, Ps. 106, John 6-7, Heb. 3-4.

- A generation that did not prepare its heart (or set their hearts aright) to seek the LORD Ps. 78:8; Jud. 5:15; 1 Chron.19:18; 2 Chron. 12:14; Ps. 57:7
- They did not know God's ways: Heb. 3:10: Ex. 33:13; Ps. 103:7; Ps. 25:4, 86:11; 27:11; Isa. 55:6-11; Isa. 57:14; Jer. 9:24, Ps. 5:8
- Whose spirits were not faithful to God--did not unite His Word with faith. Heb. 4:2; Ps. 78:8,22; 32-33; Ps. 106:24
- Hardening of heart through disobedience and rebellion: Heb. 3:8; Deut. 1:26; Heb. 3:16-19; 4:11; Ps. 78:9-10; 17; 40; Ps. 106:25
- Putting God to the test, asking for things according to their desire Ps. 78:17, 56; Matt. 4:7; 1 Cor. 10:9
- Questioning His ability to provide for them Ps. 78:19, Ps. 23
- Spiritual jealousy, not respecting His leaders Ps. 106:16-18
- Trust vs Unbelief regarding God's provision and protection Deut. 1:27-32; Num. 20:12; Josh. 14:8; Heb. 3:12-19; Heb. 4:2;
- Thankfulness vs grumbling, complaining 1 Cor. 10:10; Num. 11:1; 14:2; Ps. 106:25
- Worship vs Idolatry, following other gods Ps. 106:19, 28,29; 1 Cor. 10:7; Ps. 78:58
- Loss of first love, they quickly forgot His works Ps. 106:13, 21-22; Ps. 78:11
- Sin of presumption, walking in our own ways Ps. 106:13; 33 vs Waiting upon the LORD
- Righteousness vs Immorality 1 Cor. 10:8, Num. 25:1,9
- Crucifying the flesh vs Craved intensely in the wilderness or lust after evil things; indulged in inordinate desires (Beware of cravings...be content with what God provides) 1 Cor. 10:6; Ps. 106:14; Ex. 16:3; Num. 21:5
- Sin of worldliness Ps. 106: 34-37

3. The Wilderness reveals the extent to which we are trusting in man and the world. Israel sought to return to Egypt when things did not go the way they wanted. Even though they had been slaves, they longed for the steady meals and relative safety. Many times, throughout the Old Testament, Israel returned to Egypt in times of war or famine. God is glorified when we trust in Him and not man! 2 Kings 18:24; Ps. 20:7; Isa. 31:1. Read Jer. 17:5-10 and note the contrast between those who trust in mankind versus those who trust in the LORD. When something bad happens, who do we turn to first? God or friends?

4. One of the tests a believer may face in the wilderness is the sense of loss of God's nearness. We may feel abandoned or forgotten. 2 Chronicles 32:31b (NLT) tells us that "...God withdrew from Hezekiah in order to test him and to see what was really in his heart." When Moses met with God on the mountain to receive the law, Israel thought they had been abandoned by God. They immediately forgot Him and turned to idolatry and debauchery. They turned aside from God's commandments with very little hesitation. **We must be aware that the flesh will seek to fill in other things very quickly when our experience of God's presence is dimmed.** We can choose to remember His promises and continue to walk by faith. Will we remember and hold on to the promises God has given us in His Word? Will we press in and continue to seek Him! He has promised that He will never leave us, or fail us, or forsake us. We need to be very aware of His promises and hold on to them by faith when our feelings do not line up with His Word. Have you ever had a time when you experienced a dry period in the Word? What did you do? Did you press in and pray and seek the Lord or did you turn on the TV or pick up a novel to read? **In the wilderness, we will be tempted to sin, to become complacent or return to former sin patterns. In the wilderness His eye is upon us, scrutinizing our choices very carefully. Will we wait patiently for Him or will we build a golden calf?** Hos. 6:3; Ex. 32:1-4

5. The wilderness brings forth incredible fruit for those who yield to God and place their faith in Him. It is a place where the LORD draws us into intimate friendship and maturity in Christlikeness. He teaches us to trust Him fully and walk by faith. He said He would lead Gomer into the desert (wilderness) and speak tenderly to her there. Our relationship with him is changed from Master and Slave or Owner to Friend. If we allow the wilderness to complete its work in our hearts, we will emerge with a deeper sense of dependence on the LORD, a greater capacity to love, walk in intimacy with your Savior. We will learn how to walk by faith and rely upon His Word as our source of nutrition and direction. Deut. 8:2: Ps. 107

- It is a place of exposure of our sins so we can be brought to repentance
- It is a season of breaking and rebuilding
- God strips away our "victim—why me?" mentality
- God exposes the extent of our reliance on external or worldly supports
- God strips us of pride and self-sufficiency
- To be humbled Deut. 8:2, 16
- Realization that we are not abandoned, but that God is an ever-present source of help
- A place where we learn to live by faith
- We see how God carries us, just as a man carries his son Deut. 1:31
- We gain endurance and develop perseverance
- Tears down our worldly ways of thinking and provides opportunity to walk in God's ways
- The wilderness is an opportunity to demonstrate our trust in God's provision Deut. 1:32
- To understand the vital importance of His Word in order to live Deut. 8:3
- To understand God's discipline is like that of a father for His child Deut. 8:5
- To be instructed in those dangers that await those who do not remain faithful to God's commands Deut. 8:19-20
- Our relationship with the LORD is transformed from master and slave to friend
- Strips us from comparison, performance and competition with others
- We are prepared to move into our full inheritance and calling
- He opens our hearts to desire Him as our vital necessity and hearken to His voice

In summary, the wilderness is a time in which God accelerates our spiritual growth and prepares us to walk with Him. The wilderness is a time of preparation for greater responsibility in His Kingdom.

1. If you find yourself in the wilderness, ask the LORD to complete His purposes in your life. We are encouraged to “buy gold” that is refined in the fire. Rev. 3:18
2. Hold fast to your hope in the LORD, seek Him with your whole heart, cling to Him and rejoice in His discipline.
3. Thank Him in all things and for everything, even if you don’t understand the reasons.
4. Remain in the Word and prayer. Cry out for wisdom, understanding and discernment.
5. Ask the LORD to give you a tender heart toward His Spirit, so you can respond quickly to repent of any sin He reveals in your heart.
6. Take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, so that you choose to live with a heart full of faith, thanksgiving and obedience.
7. Walk by faith in His character. Use this time in the wilderness to seek the LORD with your whole heart and cultivate faithfulness and intimacy with your Savior. Embrace the work of the LORD in your life so that His full purposes will be accomplished.

Digging Deeper in the Word:

1. **Have you found yourself in a wilderness experience?** How would you describe your feelings of this time? Did you know you were in the wilderness? What have you learned to help you succeed in the wilderness?
2. Hebrews 3:7-4:16 is another passage that looks extensively at the failure of Israel in the wilderness. Read this passage carefully and note the warnings. Ask the LORD to make your heart tender to His Spirit’s conviction. Meditate especially on Heb. 4:2 and 4:12 in context to this entire passage. How can we practically unite our faith with the hearing of the Word?
3. **We can learn much from the examples that were given to us in the Word!** We are given beautiful examples of those who emerged from the wilderness as leaders, prepared for fulfilling His plans and purposes. We also see us the example of the ones who wandered in the wilderness their whole lives—those of whom it is said God was not well pleased. God’s Word gives us everything we need to equip us for our journey through the wilderness. As you study the wilderness experiences of each of the following lives, pay attention to how each one responded to their wilderness experience. Ask yourself how you can apply their examples in your life. Make a list of the characteristics and patterns you see in those who emerged from the wilderness with a purification of their relationship with the Lord. Deut. 8
 - **Joshua and Caleb:** Only two of that generation made it into the Promised Land. Joshua and Caleb. It is interesting to note that Caleb’s name means, “boldness or confidence” and is the Hebrew word for “dog.” It is said that he followed hard after God all of his life. What character qualities differentiated Joshua and Caleb from the rest of their generation? They were not afraid of the evil inhabitants of the land and trusted that God would give them a victory. The Lord said that Caleb “followed the LORD fully.” Deut. 1:3; 35-36; Num. 14:24; Josh. 14:8, 9, 14
 - **Gomer:** Hosea 2 provides a close up look at one person’s wilderness experience from God’s perspective. What did God do create Gomer’s wilderness experience? What were His purposes?
 - **Abraham:** Gen. 12; 13:14.; Isa. 52:1 God called Abraham to leave all that he had known to go where he knew not. He did not immediately go “alone” but he came with his father and

nephew. It was not until his father died and he separated from Lot that God was able to give him possession of the land. Abraham learned to trust God's promises.

- **Hagar and Ishmael:** There are two wilderness experiences recorded regarding Hagar. What did she learn about God in the wilderness? What name did she declare for God? How does knowing this name have the potential to change our behavior in the wilderness? Gen. 16; Gen. 21:14-21
- **Jacob:** Jacob was forced to flee into the wilderness because his own brother was angry enough to kill him after Jacob deceived him and stole his birthright. Jacob wrestled with God, but the significant thing to remember is that he did not let go of God, he held on to Him. Gen. 32:24-25
- **Joseph:** Joseph was thrown into a cistern in the wilderness by his own brothers. He was rejected and betrayed by his family, unjustly accused, imprisoned for at least 12 years. He emerged from this time with integrity, trained for leadership and with a heart of love and forgiveness for those who had rejected him. Read Gen. 50:20: What does this verse tell you about Joseph's perspective?

Moses: After having been raised in the royal courts of the Pharaoh, at 40 years of age, Moses was forced to flee into the wilderness of the Midianites. After 40 years he went "deep into the wilderness near Sinai, the mountain of God. This is where the LORD appeared to him in a burning bush. Read Ex. 3-4 and note what Moses learned during this time in the wilderness with Moses.

David: David spent two significant periods of time in the wilderness. The first was when he shepherded his family's flocks in the wilderness. God drew him into relationship with Himself and trained his hand for battle. The second time in the wilderness occurred as he fled from Saul. This time God prepared his heart to be a leader and king over God's people.

Jesus The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. It is interesting that He was tempted in the same ways Israel was tempted but fell to during their time in the wilderness. Compare the ways Israel failed the tests with Jesus who spent 40 days in the wilderness to be tested in these same three areas and emerge victorious in His encounter with the devil. How did Jesus defeat Satan's temptations and lies? How does Jesus victory over temptation affect us? Compare Jesus' temptations with those of Eve. See Gen. 3:1; Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 1: 12; Luke 4:1-14

Jesus often withdrew into the wilderness (solitary place) to pray. Why do you think he chose the wilderness to pray?

What is the LORD speaking to you?

How would you like to respond to God?