



Session 7 - The Wilderness

Wilderness - midbar (mid·bär') -

1. uninhabited land, wilderness
2. mouth (as organ of speech)

Wilderness - erēmos (e'-rā-mos)

1. solitary, lonely, desolate, uninhabited (no water)
2. deserted places, lonely regions
3. of a flock deserted by the shepherd
4. of a woman neglected by her husband, from whom the husband withholds himself

In understanding wilderness it is important for us to gain some insight into this principle. The wilderness is not to be viewed by us as a place of lost hope or a place that we are not supposed to be.

Exodus 15:22 (NASB) Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water.

The Wilderness is exactly where God *wanted* them to go.

Exodus 7:16 (NASB) "You shall say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness. But behold, you have not listened until now.'"

Let's look at some other Wilderness experiences in scripture.

Matthew 3:1 (NASB) 1 Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying,

Luke 4:1 (NASB) 1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness.

Genesis 37:22 (NASB) Reuben further said to them, "Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but do not lay hands on him"--that he might rescue him out of their hands, to restore him to his father.

Exodus 4:27 (NASB) Now the LORD said to Aaron, "Go to meet Moses in the wilderness." So he went and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him.

We all go into the Wilderness. For the four individuals we just looked at, the Wilderness preceded their ministries.

There will always be a central purpose in the wilderness, this doesn't change.

The central purpose is for us to be brought to a place where we arrive at a deeper level of TRUST in Him. This is a deeper level of trust than salvation trust. This is a level of trust and belief where we quite literally cross over into a deeper understanding of the trust He requires of us in order to experience the Abundant, Spirit Filled life.

Let's look to our example here of the Children of Israel to really see this point made scripturally.

Numbers 13:25-33 (NASB) 25 When they returned from spying out the land, at the end of forty days, 26 they proceeded to come to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the sons of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; and they brought back word to them and to all the congregation and showed them the fruit of the land. 27 Thus they told him, and said, "We went in to the land where you sent us; and it certainly does flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. 28 "Nevertheless, the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large; and moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak there. 29 "Amalek is living in the land of the Negev and the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Amorites are living in the hill country, and the Canaanites are living by the sea and by the side of the Jordan." 30 Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it." 31 But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us." 32 So they gave out to the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, "The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size. 33 "There also we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim); and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."

Notice who God told Moses would be in the land.

Exodus 3:6-8 (NASB) 6 He said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. 7 The LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their

taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. 8 "So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite."

This is the continuation of the promise made to Abraham.

Genesis 15:18-21 (NASB) 18 In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: 19 The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, 20 And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, 21 And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.

WILDERNESS WORK ACCOMPLISHED IN JOSHUA & CALEB

Numbers 14:6-11 (NASB) 6 Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; 7 and they spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, "The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. 8 "If the LORD is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us--a land which flows with milk and honey. 9 "Only do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them." 10 But all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Then the glory of the LORD appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel. 11 The LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst?"

Isn't it interesting how a group of people could go into a land and one group come out and be focused on how large the people are and another group come out and say they will be our prey.

How in the world does that happen? One group walks by faith and the other group walks by sight. One group has their eyes fixed on Christ and the eternal the other has their eyes fixed on themselves and the temporary.

Notice what Jesus had to say concerning those that went to look for John the Baptist in the Wildernes.:

Luke 7:24 (NASB) 24 When the messengers of John had left, He began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?"

This is exactly what happened to Joshua and Caleb.

But notice it wasn't so much *them* that got stronger it was their Faith/Trust that God had all of this under control. OBJECT OF FAITH

The wilderness is a place that He uses to test us and refine us. To bring us to a stronger faith/trust in Him.

Deuteronomy 1:26-32 (NASB) 26 "Yet you were not willing to go up, but rebelled against the command of the LORD your God; 27 and you grumbled in your tents and said, 'Because the LORD hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us. 28 'Where can we go up? Our brethren have made our hearts melt, saying, "The people are bigger and taller than we; the cities are large and fortified to heaven. And besides, we saw the sons of the Anakim there.'" 29 "Then I said to you, 'Do not be shocked, nor fear them. 30 'The LORD your God who goes before you will Himself fight on your behalf, just as He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, 31 and in the wilderness where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, just as a man carries his son, in all the way which you have walked until you came to this place.' 32 "But for all this, you did not trust the LORD your God."

The writer of Hebrews ties all of this together for us. Something to **remember** about the Hebrews here is that this was a **group of believers** who were finding it so **difficult** to live out the Christian life that they wanted to **turn back** to living out their faith in the way that they were comfortable with (just like their forefathers did...wanting to go back to Egypt).

Hebrews 3:8-13,18-19 (NASB) 8 DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS, 9 WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED Me BY TESTING Me, AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS. 10 "THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION, AND SAID, 'THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART, AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS'; 11 AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, 'THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.'" 12 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin...18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? 19 So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

God said He was angry with them....and WHY because they had seen all of these miraculous works of His and they still didn't trust Him.

This is why He says “**AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS.**” He says this because they had seen enough that the measure of faith that they needed to have had been fulfilled. He had shown them enough works that it should have been enough for them.

We can't forget that the works He showed them were before they arrived to the border of the promised land and decided to not go in.

1. The Red Sea had parted and they walked thru and all of Egypt's army was destroyed
2. Manna was provided for them
3. Cloud by day and pillar of fire by night
4. The Ten Commandments were provided miraculously
5. The spies go into Canaan and bring back huge pieces of fruit, proving what God said the land would be like
6. The miracle of all of quail being sent (3 feet deep) so that they had meat to eat
7. Not to mention the plagues they had seen in Egypt

Just like with Moses, when God became angry with Moses because He had done enough miracles in his sight for Moses to trust Him to handle his ability to speak to the people, God became angry with them because they had been given enough signs to have been able to cross into Canaan.

But they didn't...and why?

12 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin...18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? 19 So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

Unbelieving heart - This is not to be mistaken with unbelieving heart for salvation. These people had already been through the salvation experience (Passover) this is about an unbelieving heart as it relates to trust in Him for my faith journey.

James 2:14,17 (NASB) 14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him...17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

Understanding what is being said about the wilderness in Hebrews and using the diagram we can also understand better what is being said in James. We can see here that James isn't talking about salvation, James is talking about the type of faith that can save them from turning back! (IT'S INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT THE WRITER OF HEBREWS AND JAMES ARE ESSENTIALLY WRITING TO THE SAME TYPE OF BELIEVER, A BELIEVER WHO IS BEING PERSECUTED FOR THEIR FAITH AND WANTING TO TURN BACK).

So that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin - What happened to all those people in the wilderness? They were deceived.

When were they deceived? At this moment:

Exodus 24:7 (NASB) 7 Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!"

They were deceived into believing that the way they were going to get through the wilderness as well as be able to get into Canaan was to please Him with their obedient works.

It was at this moment they bit into the same fruit that brought Adam and Eve down and they looked to the Law to perfect their faith. When someone looks to the Law to perfect their faith what they are really accepting is that **they** must perfect their faith.

If I believe that I must perfect myself then He isn't carrying me through the Wilderness, I'm trying to walk through the Wilderness and I CAN'T DO IT!!!

Why didn't they enter into Canaan, an abundant, spirit filled life? The writer of Hebrews tells us:

19 So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

Unbelief or lack of trust is why they didn't enter.

THEIR LEGALISM KEPT THEM FROM THE ABUNDANT WALK THAT HE DESIRED WITH THEM.

We must go back and remember a very important principle about the Wilderness though.

Everyone goes through a period of time in their lives that God takes them through that allows them experience the stripping away of self that is required to be able to enter into Canaan.

Everyone will. It is a part of the journey that He has set before each and every one of us.

The logical question that comes is how? The only answer that can be provided is: Trust.

The very next question will be well how do I trust enough? The answer is you can't. The only thing you can do is this:

Hebrews 12:2 (NASB) 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The Wilderness is His tool to bring us to a place in our faith where we are ready to begin trusting Him at a depth that is needed to cross over into Canaan.

How do we make our Wilderness journey the length that God has for it to be?

Keep our eyes fixed on Him and trust Him that He will deliver us into Canaan.

Remember the following:

Romans 12:3 (NASB) For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.

Since we know that He has allotted to each of us a measure of faith a measure that He (and He alone knows) then why don't we go to Him to ask Him help us with our belief or lack there of?

Mark 9:23-24 (NASB) 23 And Jesus said to him, "If You can?" All things are possible to him who believes." 24 Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "I do believe; help my unbelief."

This is where we need to go! What is wrong with simply asking God to help us with our lack of trust. Ask Him to help us with the trust that we have and that we want Him to bring us to the level of trust He desires for us and to do whatever is required to get us there.