

"The Wilderness Experience of Israel"



In that precarious place called the wilderness, the children of Israel learned to trust God, and to believe profoundly in His goodness and mercy despite the wilderness. Thus, they had to learn to trust that God is still good... that God is for them and not against them even amidst the unpredictability of life. Though God seemed

unpredictable to them, they ultimately learned that He was predictably good. So the wilderness is a place of exile from a predictable kind of a God; we are forced to give up on that kind of a God. The wilderness forces us to let go of our control, and in the dark night of faith, we let God lead us in the journey to the Promised Land even if we get there indirectly by the way of the desert. The experience of the wilderness opens us up to a deeper and more profound faith in God and in His goodness even as we wander through the lonely desert. God says, "I will allure you, and bring you to the lonely wilderness, and there in your heart, I will speak tenderly... in the barren soil of your loneliness, I will speak my love... I will betroth you to Me forever as My spouse... I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and then you will know Me as your Husband, and as your Lord" (Hosea 2:14-20). It is in the wilderness of life that God betroths Himself to us in such deep intimacy... an intimacy that doesn't spring from factual knowledge of God, but an intimacy that comes from trusting Him in the midst of a desolate wilderness.

"The Wilderness Is Not The End Of The Story"

The Scripture says that God always brings His people out of the wilderness... just as the Israelites and Jesus Himself emerged from their wandering in the desert. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the wilderness is the place where salvation dawns... the place that gives way to a land rich in water and life... the place that ceases to be a place of exile and alienation. The promise is the Promised Land (note the word "promised"), and we arrive in God's time, and on God's terms. It is in the wilderness that we learn to give up our illusion of a God that will make life easy for us... a God that will do what we want Him to do... a God of our own liking and making. "It is the cross that helps us arrive at that position... if God can allow His Son to be stretched out on a piece of wood and left to hang there until He dies, then we cannot escape the reality and destiny of the cross. Ultimately, it is the cross that sustains us in the wilderness... that continues to give us faith and hope... because when we gaze upon it, we see not only death and abandonment, but that the Lord Jesus who endured the cross was not allowed to remain there... that He who felt abandoned by His Father was vindicated. And so like Jesus, we will not be abandoned, that we may also see the Land of the living."



Anyone who travels the "Spiritual Path" of sanctification (being conformed to the image of Christ) will ultimately discover something known as the "Wilderness Experience." What exactly is it? And why does it happen to those who are faithful to God and who try to live their lives in harmony

with His will? The Bible frequently addresses this issue. Scripture often depicts the experience of God's presence or blessing with the imagery of water — streams, oases and rivers (Palms 1:3) "He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper..." (Jeremiah 17:8) "For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, Which spreads out its roots by the river, And will not fear when heat comes; But its leaf will be green, And will not be anxious in the year of drought, Nor will cease from yielding fruit."

"No Believer Can Fully Avoid The Wilderness Experience"



Conversely it describes times of distress, doubt, and alienation from God with the imagery of a desert or wilderness. The wilderness is where water is scarce... where a traveler walks alone in the heat and the cold without shade or protection... and where wild animals live. In a spiritual wilderness God feels far away, distant, absent, and unresponsive...

faith feels doubtful or uncertain... we feel alone, vulnerable, lost, and unprotected... there is the fear of hopelessness and the unknown...and it's the place where Satan resides. It is the path we must all travel. It can take the form of depression... a crisis of faith... or one or more traumatic life events, of which the list is endless. It is not a joyful time. It is a time when we feel alone, deserted, and dying of spiritual thirst in the midst of a debilitating spiritual draught. There is not much solace in a wilderness experience, but it should bring some comfort to us to realize that every believer is subjected to such encounters. All true saints go through a wilderness experienced in their life; some more than others. Why, you ask? Our first thought usually is that it was caused by some sin... but sin is not the reason God sends us into the wilderness. In the wilderness we are not being punished — we are being tested, and our faith is being strengthened.

"King David Was No Stranger To Wilderness Experiences"



(Psalm 28:1-2) "To You I will cry, O LORD my Rock: Do not be silent to me, lest, if You are silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit. Hear the voice of my supplications when I cry to You, when I lift up my hands toward Your holy sanctuary." and though he sinned like you and me, yet he was "A Man After God's Own Heart" David wrote a number of psalms that speak to the hearts of fellow believers when they are spiritual dryness. Spiritual dryness, or the wilderness

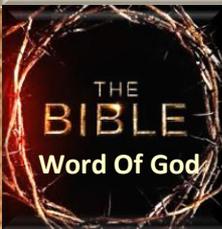
experience, is God's way of getting us to exercise our faith even when there is little feedback or affirmation or emotional joy.

"When We Are Undergoing A Wilderness Experience, The Devil Will Come Alongside Us"



Satan's primary purpose is to tempt us to doubt God and to serve him (and ourselves). As he did with Jesus in His wilderness experience, Satan will show us all kinds of things that will appear to be good, attractive and wonderful. Satan's supreme goal is to get us to disobey God, to destroy our fellowship with God, and to steal our destiny & blessings. During the wilderness experience we will be tempted to give up and doubt the integrity of God's Word—it's a time

when we become confused, frustrated, irritable, and angry... we move from thoughts of faith to thoughts of doubt; from thoughts of being faithful to thoughts of being self-centered. In the wilderness we are tempted to do our own thing, and try to make things happen in our own strength. We are strongly tempted to doubt and question. If we are to come out of the wilderness triumphantly, we must follow the example of how Jesus gained the victory over the devil in the wilderness.



"How Did Jesus Defeat The Enemy?"

First, He fully submitted to God and His will for His life... and second, He fully trusted the Word of God. The only weapon Jesus used was the Word (Matthew 4: 1-11). That should tell us that only way the enemy can be defeated is by the Word of God.



We cannot afford to respond with fear, doubt, worry, and unbelief... because when we do it only gives Satan a foothold in our lives. As we speak the Word over our situations and circumstances, and affirm the truth over and over again, it will ultimately settle peacefully in our souls, thus renewing our confidence that everything is truly working for our good and for God's glory (Romans 8:28-29) "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His

purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren." (Philippians 4:6-7) "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Hebrews 12:10-11) "For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." The resultant peace that comes from God's Word is actually a weapon or tool for us to use against the enemy's attacks. When we experience God's peace our enemy is completely dumbfounded; it silences him; he simply can't understand how we can praise and worship God in the midst of trial and difficulty. Moreover, our confidence in God's Word lets the devil know we refuse to exchange the truth of God for his lies. When we maintain our peace in the wilderness, we honor God, and this overwhelms the enemy and he flees from us — "Submit to God; resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). The only way to resist the devil is with God's Word — you fight lies with truth. (John 8:31-32) "Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My Word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

"We Must Hide The Word of God In Our Heart"

We must put the Word in our hearts in abundance (Psalm 119:10-11) "With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your Word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.", for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks; "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." (Luke 6:45). We must renew our minds and our hearts with God's Word that we might be able to stand firm in the presence of the Evil One.