

Moses Bible Study: Wilderness Lessons

Introductory Comments

1. Scripture tells us that from the day Moses freed the Israelites to the day he died at Mont Nebo, when the Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land, forty years passed, a period typically referred to as the Wilderness Wandering.
2. The wilderness was the vast Sinai Peninsula, where Israel would spend those forty years. The shortest path from Egypt to the Promised Land, with the smoothest road, was along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, on an ancient trade route. But God chose not to send the Israelites on that path, for fear that potential conflicts might send them running back to Egypt. Thus, we have the circuitous route that leads them through the Sea of Reeds and on to Sinai.
3. As the people wander, they come to construct a portable Tent of Meeting. The writer of Exodus spends more time on instructions for building the Tent of Meeting and its furnishings (Exodus 25-40) than on the actual Exodus from Egypt. Why do you suppose this is?
4. After two years, they actually arrive to a place just a few miles from the Promised Land, but fear overwhelms them and they must remain in the desert for another 38 years!
5. In today's session we will explore the lessons of shared leadership from Israel's time in the wilderness. We will examine the role of sacred spaces for the Israelites and for us. We will encounter the impact of complaining and fear. And we will reflect on ways in which we might respond to God's word as revealed in wilderness wanderings.

Questions, then read Numbers 14:2-4; Exodus 18:13-27

Questions for Discussion

1. **What constitutes a wilderness? For you, what is a wilderness like? Think about a time in your life when you were "wandering in the wilderness" (spiritually, not hiking/camping). What was the cause? Was it of your own making, or were there circumstances beyond your control? What challenges did you face? How did you get through it, and what did you learn?**

- 2. Have there been times in your life when you complained a lot? What did you learn from those experiences? What do the Israelites' complaints teach you about complaint?**

- 3. What are some of the principles of shared leadership described in the passage from Exodus 18? A. Choose the right people – capable, reverent, and trustworthy. B. Train the people well. C. Empower and authorize them in front of the people they will be leading. D. Make clear what needs approval and what they can decide on their own. What examples of leadership do you see in our church? How do they benefit pastor and congregation?**

- 4. The Tent of Meeting functioned as both palace and temple (show picture), which meant it was a place to draw close to God but also to be reminded of God's royal power. For a long time in our history, the most beautiful and architecturally meaningful buildings were churches and other religious structures. They were designed to be visible reminders of God's presence and to draw people into that presence. Which structures in today's world provide the most meaningful and inspiring architecture? What, if anything, do you think this indicates about our culture and where we place our priorities? Today, we see meaningful and inspiring architecture in performing arts centers, museums, and the occasional office building.**

- 5. What is your vision of the "Promised Land?" What are some ways to keep that vision front and center when we are frustrated or discouraged by a situation?**

- 6. After two years of wandering in the wilderness, the Israelites set up camp just a few miles from the Promised Land. But when their scouts tell them about the fortified cities within, the people cry: "We can't go up against the people because they are stronger than we... All the people we saw in it were huge men... We saw ourselves as grasshoppers, and that's how we appeared to them." (Numbers 13:3—33). What are some of the things that might prevent us from entering the "Promised Land" of a more fulfilling life?**

****For the final session, read Deuteronomy 6:4-7, 20-25; 8:12-14, 17-18*